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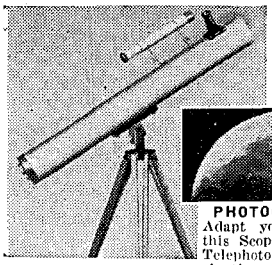

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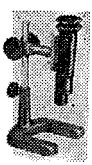

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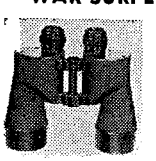

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MARCH
1959

Novelette

Despoilers of the Golden Empire
David Gordon 10

Short Stories

Instinct, *George O. Smith* 44
The Man Who Did Not Fit, *Algis Budrys* 55
Translation Error, *Robert Silverberg* . . . 76

Serial

The Pirates of Ersatz, *Murray Leinster* . . 92
(Part Two of Three Parts)

Readers' Departments

The Editor's Page 6
The Reference Library, *P. Schuyler Miller* 138
Brass Tacks 149

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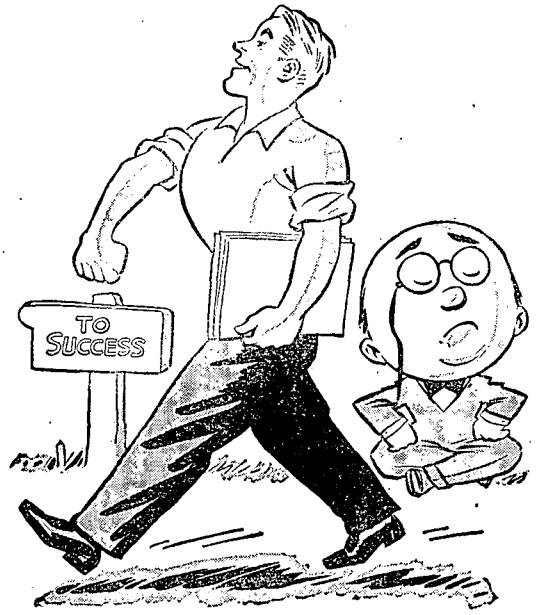

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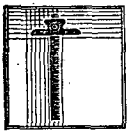

HERE'S an ancient tendency of human beings to hold that if X should not exist . . . it therefore doesn't, really. "Why, you *can't* believe that!" is a fairly familiar example "They can't put you in jail for that!" sometimes has the response, "Look; I'm calling from the jail now."

Another familiar tendency is to hold that if Alpha is or has been used for destructive purposes, then Alpha is destructive—evil—something to be eliminated. And razors are instruments used for cutting human throats; pillows are used for smothering people, and water for drowning people. Away with them!

Now Hitler & Company made much of the concept of the Superman, and talked about Nietzsche as the authority for saying Supermen existed. This proves, maybe, that the Superman idea is destructive, and should be done away with; along with razors, pillows and water?

The great trouble is that something that is spectacularly potent and painful is apt to get labeled "Bad Medicine! Keep Away!" Practically all the land animals of Earth dread fire; it's spectacularly potent and painful. Man alone has accepted that risk—and found the immense power of Fire a tool as spectacularly potent as is Fire's destructive talents.

The Superman, like Fire, is spectacularly potent — and frequently painful. To say—as human wishing tends to make us!—that Supermen don't exist, that there are no Heroes —is foolishness. There are; there

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always have been. And the Heroes—which is simply a somewhat older term for Superman—are almost invariably painful to those around them.

For one thing, a Hero-Superman is psychologically painful; he forces the normal, or even bright-normal man, to recognize that he is *not* the brightest possible individual in the brightest possible world. It's psychologically painful to come up against someone who can, in thirty minutes conversation, learn enough of your field of specialization to (a) understand the problem you're struggling with, (b) express it more clearly than you've been able to in six months of hard work, and (c) suggest a solution that proves, on test, to work perfectly. That may be helpful—but it's the kind of help a preanesthesia surgeon gave. No doubt the surgeon saved the patient's life by sawing off his leg, and cauterizing the stump with red-hot iron or boiling pitch . . . but the help was, none the less, acutely painful.

A friend of mine has done something, recently, that is probably somewhat painful to many pump-design engineers. He's invented a new type of pump. It has one moving part; that one part need not be machined accurately, and is, of course, simply a lobed rotor, which can be in static and dynamic balance. The great problem in gas pumps has always been the seal—the gimmick that keeps the high-pressure gas from leaking back to the low-pressure side. In piston pumps, this is a set of piston rings. It's the seal that has always required precision machining, and led to friction and losses.

My friend has a new type of seal; it cannot be worn out, blown out, corroded out, eroded away, or damaged in any way whatsoever. Also, it costs nothing to make, and requires no precision cutting, since it's self-generating and self-maintaining. The resultant pump, on engineering test, shows better than ninety-nine per cent volumetric efficiency, and, in some models, over ninety per cent power efficiency.

It is also, of course, much cheaper to make, because of the low requirements of machining accuracy. Rough it out with a hand file, and it works fine.

The trick? You've heard of "the sound barrier"? That's what this pump uses for a seal—a standing shock wave. You can't push a gas through a shock wave—and shock waves are self-generating and self-maintaining and self-adjusting to the volume available. Obviously, such a seal can't be worn, blown, corroded, or eroded out. And a standing shock wave doesn't consume much energy—a darned sight less than the friction drag of a piston ring, for example. The pump can give one thousand pounds per square inch in a single stage, and five thousand psi in a five-stage pump.

Many times, the very fact that an idea is "elegant," in the old scientific sense of being a beautifully simple, clear, and classically simple solution to a problem, makes it acutely

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uncomfortable to those who have been working in the field.

The Superman will, because he does come up with such brilliant maneuvers consistently, be painful. But that fact doesn't determine whether he is a force for Good or Evil; the pre-anesthesia surgeon was acutely painful, too.

In our modern hyperdemocratic culture, the Superman can not be tolerated—he makes it painfully apparent that we are not all equal. Therefore, a hyperdemocracy is full of assertions that "there is no such thing as all-round superiority,' or 'general superiority,' but only special skills." It is also full of analyses that show that So-and-so, considered so great a hero, was, really, a stuffed shirt, and not at all unusual or great.

Matter of fact, the only Supermen that our culture acknowledges are the Supervillains—Genghis Khan is admissible, but Heroes who benefited Mankind are not. The reason is simple; beneficial supermen aren't tolerable in a hyperdemocracy, so emphasis must be placed on the destructive side of superiority. Razors as throat-cutting instruments must be emphasized; arsenic as a poison, but not as the invaluable tonic—electricity as the electrocuting power, not as the motive force of half our industry.

First, let's see if such a thing as general, overall superiority — *not* mere special skill—exists.

Every psychologist has been carefully taught that the idea of "overall superiority" is nonsense, and elaborate experiments have been set up to "prove" this "fact."

They're fruit-cake experiments, with built-in bugger factors guaranteed to make the answer come out wrong.

Reason: they're scientifically planned and organized experiments. That's guaranteed to make the answer come out wrong!

Look at it this way: you can't possibly make a successful business based on the improbable. By definition! You can't sanely plan on building your livelihood on freak events. Lloyds of London will, no doubt, insure you against death by being struck by a meteorite while on or near the surface of the Earth . . . but they're betting that the wild improbability *won't* happen, not that it *will*.

A scientific experiment has to be planned, organized . . . and based on the probable, not the improbable.

But in real living, Finnagle's Law operates; if something can happen . . . it will.

A scientific experiment must be repeatable. Finnagle's Law simply says "Some experiments aren't repeatable." Then such experiments aren't scientific!

You cannot plan to breed a particular mutant; you can only establish conditions under which such a mutant will be detected if it occurs.

Now: Given that the psychologist holds the theory that "No such thing as general superiority exists," how should he set up an experiment to test the proposition?

(*Continued on page* 158)

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DESPOILERS OF THE GOLDEN EMPIRE

BY DAVID GORDON

A handful of men, and an incredible adventure—a few super-men, led by a fanatic, seeking to conquer a new world!

Illustrated by Freas

I

IN THE seven centuries that had elapsed since the Second Empire had been founded on the shattered remnants of the First, the nobles of the Imperium had come slowly to realize that the empire was not to be judged by the examples of its predecessor. The First Empire had conquered most of the known universe by political intrigue and sheer military strength; it had fallen because that same propensity for political intrigue had gained over every other strength of the Empire, and the various branches and sectors of the First Empire had begun to use it against one another.

The Second Empire was politically unlike the First; it tried to balance a centralized government against the autonomic governments of the various sectors, and had almost succeeded in doing so.

But, no matter how governed, there are certain essentials which are needed by any governmental organization.

Without power, neither Civiliza-

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tion nor the Empire could hold itself together, and His Universal Majesty, the Emperor Carl, well knew it. And power was linked solidly to one element, one metal, without which Civilization would collapse as surely as if it had been blasted out of existence. Without the power metal, no ship could move or even be built; without it, industry would come to a standstill.

In ancient times, even as far back as the early Greek and Roman civilizations, the metal had been known, but it had been used, for the most part, as decoration and in the manufacture of jewelry. Later, it had been coined as money.

It had always been relatively rare, but now, weight for weight, atom for atom, it was the most valuable element on Earth. Indeed, the most valuable in the known universe.

The metal was Element Number Seventy-nine—gold.

To the collective mind of the Empire, gold was the prime object in any kind of mining exploration. The idea of drilling for petroleum, even if it had been readily available, or of mining coal or uranium would have been dismissed as impracticable and even worse than useless.

Throughout the Empire, research laboratories worked tirelessly at the problem of transmuting commoner elements into Gold-197, but thus far none of the processes was commercially feasible. There was still, after thousands of years, only one way to get the power metal: extract it from the ground.

So it was that, across the great gulf between the worlds, ship after ship moved in search of the metal that would hold the far-flung colonies of the Empire together. Every adventurer who could manage to get aboard was glad to be cooped up on a ship during the long months it took to cross the empty expanses, was glad to endure the hardships on alien terrain, on the chance that his efforts might pay off a thousand or ten thousand fold.

Of these men, a mere handful were successful, and of these one or two stand well above the rest. And for sheer determination, drive, and courage, for the will to push on toward his goal, no matter what the odds, a certain Commander Frank had them all beat.

II

Before you can get a picture of the commander—that is, as far as his personality goes—you have to get a picture of the man physically.

He was enough taller than the average man to make him stand out in a crowd, and he had broad shoulders and a narrow waist to match. He wasn't heavy; his was the hard, tough, wirelike strength of a steel cable. The planes of his tanned face showed that he feared neither exposure to the elements nor exposure to violence; it was seamed with fine wrinkles and the thin white lines that betray scar tissue. His mouth was heavy-lipped, but firm, and the lines around it showed that it was unused

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to smiling. The commander could laugh, and often did—a sort of roaring explosion that burst forth suddenly whenever something struck him as particularly uproarious. But he seldom just smiled; Commander Frank rarely went halfway in anything.

His eyes, like his hair, were a deep brown—almost black, and they were set well back beneath heavy brows that tended to frown most of the time.

Primarily, he was a military man. He had no particular flair for science, and, although he had a firm and deep-seated grasp of the essential philosophy of the Universal Assembly, he had no inclination towards the kind of life necessarily led by those who would become higher officers of the Assembly. It was enough that the Assembly was behind him; it was enough to know that he was a member of the only race in the known universe which had a working knowledge of the essential, basic Truth of the Cosmos. With a weapon like that, even an ordinary soldier had little to fear, and Commander Frank was far from being an ordinary soldier.

He had spent nearly forty of his sixty years of life as an explorer-soldier for the Emperor, and during that time he'd kept his eyes open for opportunity. Every time his ship had landed, he'd watched and listened and collected data. And now he knew.

If his data were correct—and he was certain that they were—he had found his strike. All he needed was the men to take it.

III

The expedition had been poorly outfitted and undermanned from the beginning. The commander had been short of money at the outset, having spent almost all he could raise on his own, plus nearly everything he could beg or borrow, on his first two probing expeditions, neither of which had shown any real profit.

But they *had* shown promise; the alien population of the target which the commander had selected as his personal claim wore gold as ornaments, but didn't seem to think it was much above copper in value, and hadn't even progressed to the point of using it as coinage. From the second probing expedition, he had brought back two of the odd-looking aliens and enough gold to show that there must be more where that came from.

The old, hopeful statement, "There's gold in them thar hills," should have brought the commander more backing than he got, considering the Empire's need of it and the commander's evidence that it was available; but people are always more ready to bet on a sure thing than to indulge in speculation. Ten years before, a strike had been made in a sector quite distant from the commander's own find, and most of the richer nobles of the Empire preferred to back an established source of the metal than to sink money into

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what might turn out to be the pursuit of a wild goose.

Commander Frank, therefore, could only recruit men who were willing to take a chance, who were willing to risk anything, even their lives, against tremendously long odds.

And, even if they succeeded, the Imperial Government would take twenty per cent of the gross without so much as a by-your-leave. There was no other market for the metal except back home, so the tax could not be avoided; gold was no good whatsoever in the uncharted wilds of an alien world.

Because of his lack of funds, the commander's expedition was not only dangerously undermanned, but illegally so. It was only by means of out-and-out trickery that he managed to evade the official inspection and leave port with too few men and too little equipment.

There wasn't a scientist worthy of the name in the whole outfit, unless you call the navigator, Captain Bartholomew, an astronomer, which is certainly begging the question. There was no anthropologist aboard to study the semibarbaric civilization of the natives; there was no biologist to study the alien flora and fauna. The closest thing the commander had to physicists were engineers who could take care of the ship itself—specialist technicians, nothing more.

There was no need for armament specialists; each and every man was a soldier, and, as far as his own weapons went, an ordnance expert. As far as Commander Frank was concerned, that was enough. It had to be.

Mining equipment? He took nothing but the simplest testing apparatus. How, then, did he intend to get the metal that the Empire was screaming for?

The commander had an answer for that, too, and it was as simple as it was economical. The natives would get it for him.

They used gold for ornaments, therefore, they knew where the gold could be found. And, therefore, they would bloody well dig it out for Commander Frank.

IV

Due to atmospheric disturbances, the ship's landing was several hundred miles from the point the commander had originally picked for the debarkation of his troops. That meant a long, forced march along the coast and then inland, but there was no help for it; the ship simply wasn't built for atmospheric navigation.

That didn't deter the commander any. The orders rang through the ship: "All troops and carriers prepare for landing!"

Half an hour later, they were assembled outside the ship, fully armed and armored, and with full field gear. The sun, a yellow G-O star, hung hotly just above the towering mountains to the east. The alien air smelled odd in the men's nostrils, and the weird foliage seemed to

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rustle menacingly. In the distance, the shrieks of alien fauna occasionally echoed through the air.

A hundred and eighty-odd men and some thirty carriers stood under the tropic blaze for forty-five minutes while the commander checked over their equipment with minute precision. Nothing faulty or sloppy was going into that jungle with him if he could prevent it.

When his hard eyes had inspected every bit of equipment, when he had either passed or ordered changes in the manner of its carrying or its condition, when he was fully satisfied that every weapon was in order—then, and only then, did he turn his attention to the men themselves.

He climbed atop a little hillock and surveyed them carefully, letting his penetrating gaze pass over each man in turn. He stood there, his fists on his hips, with the sunlight gleaming from his burnished armor, for nearly a full minute before he spoke.

Then his powerful voice rang out over the assembled adventurers.

"My comrades-at-arms! We have before us a world that is ours for the taking! It contains more riches than any man on Earth ever dreamed existed, and those riches, too, are ours for the taking. It isn't going to be a picnic, and we all knew that when we came. There are dangers on every side—from the natives, from the animals and plants, and from the climate.

"But there is not one of these that cannot be overcome by the onslaught of brave, courageous, and determined men!

"Ahead of us, we will find the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse arrayed against our coming—Famine, Pestilence, War, and Death. Each and all of these we must meet and conquer as brave men should, for at their end we will find wealth and glory!"

A cheer filled the air, startling the animals in the forest into momentary silence.

The commander stilled it instantly with a raised hand.

"Some of you know this country from our previous expeditions together. Most of you will find it utterly strange. And not one of you knows it as well as I do.

"In order to survive, you must—and *will*—follow my orders to the letter—and beyond.

"First, as to your weapons. We don't have an unlimited supply of charges for them, so there will be no firing of any power weapons unless absolutely necessary. You have your swords and your pikes—use them."

Several of the men unconsciously gripped the hafts of the long steel blades at their sides as he spoke the words, but their eyes never left the commanding figure on the hummock.

"As for food," he continued, "we'll live off the land. You'll find that most of the animals are edible, but stay away from the plants unless I give the O.K.

"We have a long way to go, but, by Heaven, I'm going to get us there alive! Are you with me?"

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A hearty cheer rang from the throats of the men. They shouted the commander's name with enthusiasm.

"All right!" he bellowed. "There is one more thing! Anyone who wants to stay with the ship can do so; anyone who feels too ill to make it should consider it his duty to stay behind, because sick men will simply hold us up and weaken us more than if they'd been left behind. Remember, we're not going to turn back as a body, and an individual would never make it alone." He paused.

"Well?"

Not a man moved. The commander grinned—not with humor, but with satisfaction. "All right, then: let's move out."

V

Of them all, only a handful, including the commander, had any real knowledge of what lay ahead of them, and that knowledge only pertained to the periphery of the area the intrepid band of adventurers were entering. They knew that the aliens possessed a rudimentary civilization—they did not, at that time, realize they were entering the outposts of a powerful barbaric empire—an empire almost as well-organized and well-armed as that of First Century Rome, and, if anything, even more savage and ruthless.

It was an empire ruled by a single family who called themselves the Great Nobles; at their head was the Greatest Noble—the Child of the Sun Himself. It has since been conjectured that the Great Nobles were mutants in the true sense of the word; a race apart from their subjects. It is impossible to be absolutely sure at this late date, and the commander's expedition, lacking any qualified genticists or genetic engineers, had no way of determining—and, indeed, no real *interest* in determining—whether this was or was not true. None the less, historical evidence seems to indicate the validity of the hypothesis.

Never before—not even in ancient Egypt—had the historians ever seen a culture like it. It was an absolute monarchy that would have made any Medieval king except the most saintly look upon it in awe and envy. The Russians and the Germans never even approached it. The Japanese tried to approximate it at one time in their history, but they failed.

Secure in the knowledge that theirs was the only civilizing force on the face of the planet, the race of the Great Nobles spread over the length of a great continent, conquering the lesser races as they went.

Physically, the Great Nobles and their lesser subjects were quite similar. They were, like the commander and his men, human in every sense of the word. That this argues some ancient, prehistoric migration across the empty gulfs that separate the worlds cannot be denied, but when and how that migration took place are data lost in the mists of time. However it may have happened, the

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fact remains that these people *were* human. As someone observed in one of the reports written up by one of the officers: "They could pass for Indians, except their skins are of a decidedly redder hue."

The race of the Great Nobles held their conquered subjects in check by the exercise of two powerful forces: religion and physical power of arms. Like the feudal organizations of Medieval Europe, the Nobles had the power of life and death over their subjects, and to a much greater extent than the European nobles had. Each family lived on an allotted parcel of land and did a given job. Travel was restricted to a radius of a few miles. There was no money; there was no necessity for it, since the government of the Great Nobles took all produce and portioned it out again according to need. It was communism on a vast and—incomprehensible as it may seem to the modern mind—*workable* scale. Their minds were as different from ours as their bodies were similar; the concept "freedom" would have been totally incomprehensible to them.

They were sun-worshipers, and the Greatest Noble was the Child of the Sun, a godling subordinate only to the Sun Himself. Directly under him were the lesser Great Nobles, also Children of the Sun, but to a lesser extent. They exercised absolute power over the conquered peoples, but even they had no concept of freedom, since they were as tied to the people as the people were tied to them. It was a benevolent dictator-

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ship of a kind never seen before or since.

At the periphery of the Empire of the Sun-Child lived still unconquered savage tribes, which the Imperial forces were in the process of slowly taking over. During the centuries, tribe after tribe had fallen before the brilliant leadership of the Great Nobles and the territory of the Empire had slowly expanded until, at the time the invading Earthmen came, it covered almost as much territory as had the Roman Empire at its peak.

The Imperial Army, consisting of upwards of fifty thousand troops, was extremely mobile in spite of the handicap of having no form of transportation except their own legs. They had no cavalry; the only beast of burden known to them—the flame-beasts—were too small to carry more than a hundred pounds, in spite of their endurance. But the wide, smooth roads that ran the length and breadth of the Empire enabled a marching army to make good time, and messages carried by runners in relays could traverse the Empire in a matter of days, not weeks.

And into this tight-knit, well-organized, powerful barbaric world marched Commander Frank with less than two hundred men and thirty carriers.

VI

It didn't take long for the men to begin to chafe under the constant strain of moving through treacherous and unfamiliar territory. And the first signs of chafing made themselves apparent beneath their armor.

Even the best designed armor cannot be built to be worn for an unlimited length of time, and, at first, the men could see no reason for the order. They soon found out.

One evening, after camp had been made, one young officer decided that he had spent his last night sleeping in full armor. It was bad enough to have to march in it, but sleeping in it was too much. He took it off and stretched, enjoying the freedom from the heavy steel. His tent was a long way from the center of camp, where a small fire flickered, and the soft light from the planet's single moon filtered only dimly through the jungle foliage overhead. He didn't think anyone would see him from the commander's tent.

The commander's orders had been direct and to the point: "You will wear your armor at all times; you will march in it, you will eat in it, you will sleep in it. During such times as it is necessary to remove a part of it, the man doing so will make sure that he is surrounded by at least two of his companions in full armor. There will be no exceptions to this rule!"

The lieutenant had decided to make himself an exception.

He turned to step into his tent when a voice came out of the nearby darkness.

"Hadn't you better get your steel plates back on before the commander sees you?"

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The young officer turned quickly to see who had spoken. It was another of the junior officers.

"Mind your own business," snapped the lieutenant.

The other grinned sardonically. "And if I don't?"

There had been bad blood between these two for a long time; it was an enmity that went back to a time even before the expedition had begun. The two men stood there for a long moment, the light from the distant fire flickering uncertainly against their bodies.

The young officer who had removed his armor had not been foolish enough to remove his weapons too; no sane man did that in hostile territory. His hand went to the haft of the blade at his side.

"If you say a single word—"

Instinctively, the other dropped his hand to his own sword.

"Stop! Both of you!"

And stop they did; no one could mistake the crackling authority in that voice. The commander, unseen in the moving, dim light, had been circling the periphery of the camp, to make sure that all was well. He strode toward the two younger men, who stood silently, shocked into immobility. The commander's sword was already in his hand.

"I'll spit the first man that draws a blade," he snapped.

His keen eyes took in the situation at a glance.

"Lieutenant, what are you doing out of armor?"

"It was hot, sir, and I—"

"Shut up!" The commander's eyes were dangerous. "An asinine statement like that isn't even worth listening to! Get that armor back on! *Move!*"

He was standing approximately between the two men, who had been four or five yards apart. When the cowed young officer took a step or two back toward his tent, the commander turned toward the other officer. "And as for you, if—"

He was cut off by the yell of the unarmored man, followed by the sound of his blade singing from its sheath.

The commander leaped backwards and spun, his own sword at the ready, his body settling into a swordsman's crouch.

But the young officer was not drawing against his superior. He was hacking at something ropy and writhing that squirmed on the ground as the lieutenant's blade bit into it. Within seconds, the serpentine thing gave a convulsive shudder and died.

The lieutenant stepped back clumsily, his eyes glazing in the flickering light. "Dropped from th' tree," he said thickly. "Bit me."

His hand moved to a dark spot on his chest, but it never reached its goal. The lieutenant collapsed, crumpling to the ground.

The commander walked over, slammed the heel of his heavy boot hard down on the head of the snaky thing, crushing it. Then he returned his blade to its sheath, knelt down by the young man, and turned him over on his face.

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The commander's own face was grim.

By this time, some of the nearby men, attracted by the yell, had come running. They came to a stop as they saw the tableau before them.

The commander, kneeling beside the corpse, looked up at them. With one hand, he gestured at the body. "Let this be a lesson to all of you," he said in a tight voice. "This man died because he took off his armor. That"—he pointed at the butchered reptile—"thing is full of as deadly a poison as you'll ever see, and it can move like lightning. *But it can't bite through steel!*

"Look well at this man and tell the others what you saw. I don't want to lose another man in this idiotic fashion."

He stood up and gestured.

"Bury him."

VII

They found, as they penetrated deeper into the savage-infested hinterlands of the Empire of the Great Nobles, that the armor fended off more than just snakes. Hardly a day passed but one or more of the men would hear the sharp *spang!* of a blowgun-driven dart as it slammed ineffectually against his armored back or chest. At first, some of the men wanted to charge into the surrounding forest, whence the darts came, and punish the sniping aliens, but the commander would have none of it.

"Stick together," he ordered. "They'll do worse to us if we're split up in this jungle. Those blowgun darts aren't going to hurt you as long as they're hitting steel. Ignore them and keep moving."

They kept moving.

Around them, the jungle chattered and muttered, and, occasionally, screamed. Clouds of insects, great and small, hummed and buzzed through the air. They subsided only when the drizzling rains came, and then lifted again from their resting places when the sun came out to raise steamy vapors from the moist ground.

It was not an easy march. Before many days had passed, the men's feet were cracked and blistered from the effects of fungus, dampness, and constant marching. The compact military marching order which had characterized the first few days of march had long since deteriorated into a straggling column, where the weaker were supported by the stronger.

Three more men died. One simply dropped in his tracks. He was dead before anyone could touch him. Insect bite? Disease? No one knew.

Another had been even less fortunate. A lionlike carnivore had leaped on him during the night and clawed him badly before one of his companions blasted the thing with a power weapon. Three days later, the wounded man was begging to be killed; one arm and one leg were gangrenous. But he died while begging, thus sparing any would-be executioner from an unpleasant duty.

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The third man simply failed to show up for roll call one morning. He was never seen again.

But the rest of the column, with dauntless courage, followed the lead of their commander.

It was hard to read their expressions, those reddened eyes that peered at him from swollen, bearded faces. But he knew his own face looked no different.

"We all knew this wasn't going to be a fancy-dress ball when we came," he said. "Nobody said this was going to be the easiest way in the world to get rich."

The commander was sitting on one of the carriers, his eyes watching the men, who were lined up in front of him. His voice was purposely held low, but it carried well.

"The marching has been difficult, but now we're really going to see what we're made of.

"We all need a rest, and we all deserve one. But when I lie down to rest, I'm going to do it in a halfway decent bed, with some good, solid food in my belly.

"Here's the way the picture looks: An hour's march from here, there's a good-sized village." He swung partially away from them and pointed south. "I think we have earned that town and everything in it."

He swung back, facing them. There was a wolfish grin on his face. "There's gold there, too. Not much, really, compared with what we'll get later on, but enough to whet our appetites."

The men's faces were beginning to change now, in spite of the swelling.

"I don't think we need worry too much about the savages that are living there now. With God on our side, I hardly see how we can fail."

He went on, telling them how they would attack the town, the disposition of men, the use of the carriers, and so forth. By the time he was through, every man there was as eager as he to move in. When he finished speaking, they set up a cheer:

"For the Emperor and the Universal Assembly!"

The natives of the small village had heard that some sort of terrible beings were approaching through the jungle. Word had come from the people of the forest that the strange monsters were impervious to darts, and that they had huge dragons with them which were terrifying even to look at. They were clad in metal and made queer noises as they moved.

The village chieftain called his advisers together to ponder the situation. What should they do with these strange things? What were the invaders' intentions?

Obviously, the things must be hostile. Therefore, there were only two courses open—fight or flee. The chieftain and his men decided to fight. It would have been a good thing if there had only been some Imperial troops in the vicinity, but all the troops were farther south, where a civil war was raging over the

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right of succession of the Greatest Noble.

Nevertheless, there were two thousand fighting men in the village—well, two thousand men at any rate, and they would certainly all fight, although some were rather young and a few were too old for any really hard fighting. On the other hand, it would probably not come to that, since the strangers were outnumbered by at least three to one.

The chieftain gave his orders for the defense of the village.

The invading Earthmen approached the small town cautiously from the west. The commander had his men spread out a little, but not so much that they could be separated. He saw the aliens grouped around the square, boxlike buildings, watching and waiting for trouble.

"We'll give them trouble," the commander whispered softly. He waited until his troops were properly deployed, then he gave the signal for the charge.

The carriers went in first, thundering directly into the massed alien warriors. Each carrier-man fired a single shot from his power weapon, and then went to work with his carrier, running down the terrified aliens, and swinging a sword with one hand while he guided with the other. The commander went in with that first charge, aiming his own carrier toward the center of the fray. He had some raw, untrained men with him, and he believed in teaching by example.

The aliens recoiled at the onslaught of what they took to be horrible living monsters that were unlike anything ever seen before.

Then the commander's infantry charged in. The shock effect of the carriers had been enough to disorganize the aliens, but the battle was not over yet by a long shot.

There were yells from other parts of the village as some of the other defenders, hearing the sounds of battle, came running to reinforce the home guard. Better than fifteen hundred men were converging on the spot.

The invading Earthmen moved in rapidly against the armed natives, beating them back by the sheer ferocity of their attack. Weapons of steel clashed against weapons of bronze and wood.

The power weapons were used only sparingly; only when the necessity to save a life was greater than the necessity to conserve weapon charges was a shot fired.

The commander, from the center of the fray, took a glance around the area. One glance was enough.

"They're dropping back!" he bellowed, his voice carrying well above the din of the battle, "Keep 'em moving!" He singled out one of his officers at a distance, and yelled: "Hernan! Get a couple of men to cover that street!" He waved toward one of the narrow streets that ran off to one side. The others were already being attended to.

The commander jerked around swiftly as one of the natives grabbed

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hold of the carrier and tried to hack at the commander with a bronze sword. The commander spitted him neatly on his blade and withdrew it just in time to parry another attack from the other side.

By this time, the reinforcements from the other parts of the village were beginning to come in from the side streets, but they were a little late. The warriors in the square—what was left of them—had panicked. In an effort to get away from the terrible monsters with their deadly blades and their fire-spitting weapons, they were leaving by the same channels that the reinforcements were coming in by, and the resultant jam-up was disastrous. The panic communicated itself like wildfire, but no one could move fast enough to get away from the sweeping, stabbing, glittering blades of the invading Earthmen.

"All right," the commander yelled, "we've got 'em on the run now! Break up into squads of three and clear those streets! Clear 'em out! Keep 'em moving!"

After that, it was the work of minutes to clear the town.

The commander brought his carrier to a dead stop, reached out with his sword, and snagged a bit of cloth from one of the fallen native warriors. He began to wipe the blade of his weapon as Lieutenant commander Hernan pulled up beside him.

"Casualties?" the commander asked Hernan without looking up from his work.

"Six wounded, no dead," said Hernan. "Or did you want me to count the aliens, too?"

The commander shook his head. "No. Get a detail to clear out the carrion, and then tell Frater Vincent I want to talk to him. We'll have to start teaching these people the Truth."

VIII

"Have you anything to say in your defense?" the commander asked coldly.

For a moment, the accused looked nothing but hatred at the commander, but there was fear behind that hatred. At last he found his voice. "It was mine. You promised us all a share."

Lieutenant commander Hernan picked up a leather bag that lay on the table behind which he and the commander were sitting. With a sudden gesture, he upended it, dumping its contents on the flat, wooden surface of the table.

"Do you deny that this was found among your personal possessions?" he asked harshly.

"No," said the accused soldier. "Why should I? It's mine. Rightfully mine. I fought for it. I found it. I kept it. It's mine." He glanced to either side, towards the two guards who flanked him, then looked back at the commander.

The commander ran an idle finger through the pound or so of golden trinkets that Hernan had spilled from the bag. He knew what the trooper was thinking. A man had a

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right to what he had earned, didn't he?

The commander picked up one of the heavier bits of primitive jewelry and tossed it in his hand. Then he stood up and looked around the town square.

The company had occupied the town for several weeks. The stored grains in the community warehouse, plus the relaxation the men had had, plus the relative security of the town, had put most of the men back into condition. One had died from a skin infection, and another from wounds sustained in the assault on the town, but the remainder were in good health.

And all of them, with the exception of the sentries guarding the town's perimeter, were standing in the square, watching the court-martial. Their eyes didn't seem to blink, and their breathing was soft and measured. They were waiting for the commander's decision.

The commander, still tossing the crude golden earring, stood tall and straight, estimating the feeling of the men surrounding him.

"Gold," he said finally. "Gold. That's what we came here for, and that's what we're going to get. Five hundred pounds of the stuff would make any one of you wealthy for the rest of his life. Do you think I blame any one of you for wanting it? Do you think I blame this man here? Of course not." He laughed—a short, hard bark. "Do I blame myself?"

He tossed the bauble again, caught

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it. "But wanting it is one thing; getting it, holding it, and taking care of it wisely are something else again.

"I gave orders. I have expected—and still expect—that they will be obeyed. But I didn't give them just to hear myself give orders. There was a reason, and a good one.

"Suppose we let each man take what gold he could find. What would happen? The lucky ones would be wealthy, and the unlucky would still be poor. And then some of the lucky ones would wake up some morning without the gold they'd taken because someone else had relieved them of it while they slept.

And others wouldn't wake up at all, because they'd be found with their throats cut.

"I told you to bring every bit of the metal to me. When this thing is over, every one of you will get his share. If a man dies, his share will be split among the rest, instead of being stolen by someone else or lost because it was hidden too well."

He looked at the earring in his hand, then, with a convulsive sweep of his arm, he tossed it out into the middle of the square.

"There! Seven ounces of gold! Which of you wants it?"

Some of the men eyed the circle of metal that gleamed brightly on the sunlit ground, but none of them made any motion to pick it up.

"So." The commander's voice was almost gentle. He turned his eyes back toward the accused. "You know the orders. You knew them when you hid this." He gestured negligently toward the small heap of native-wrought metal. "Suppose you'd gotten away with it. You'd have ended up with your own share, *plus* this, thereby cheating the others out of—" He glanced at the pile. "Hm-m-m—say, twenty-five each. And that's only a little compared with what we'll get from now on."

He looked back at the others. "Unless the shares are taken care of *my* way, the largest shares will go to the dishonest, the most powerful, and the luckiest. Unless the division is made as we originally agreed, we'll end up trying to cut each other's heart out."

There was hardness in his voice when he spoke to the accused, but there was compassion there, too.

"First: You have forfeited your share in this expedition. All that you have now, and all that you might have expected will be divided among the others according to our original agreement.

"Second: I do not expect any man to work for nothing. Since you will not receive anything from this expedition, there is no point in your assisting the rest of us or working with us in any way whatsoever.

"Third: We can't have anyone with us who does not carry his own weight."

He glanced at the guards. "Hang him." He paused. "Now."

As he was led away, the commander watched the other men. There was approval in their eyes, but there was something else there,

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too—a wariness, a concealed fear.

The condemned man turned suddenly and began shouting at the commander, but before he could utter more than three syllables, a fist smashed him down. The guards dragged him off.

"All right, men," said the commander carefully, "let's search the village. There might be more gold about; I have a hunch that this isn't all he hid. Let's see if we can find the rest of it." He sensed the relief of tension as he spoke.

The commander was right. It was amazing how much gold one man had been able to stash away.

IX

They couldn't stay long in any one village; they didn't have the time to sit and relax any more than was necessary. Once they had reached the northern marches of the native empire, it was to the commander's advantage to keep his men moving. He didn't know for sure how good or how rapid communications were among the various native provinces, but he had to assume that they were top-notch, allowing for the limitations of a barbaric society.

The worst trouble they ran into on their way was not caused by the native warriors, but by disease.

The route to the south was spotted by great strips of sandy barrenness, torn by winds that swept the grains of sand into the troopers eyes and crept into the chinks of their armor. Underfoot, the sand made a treacherous pathway; carriers and men alike found it heavy going.

The heat from the sun was intense; the brilliant beams from the primary seemed to penetrate through the men's armor and through the insulation underneath, and made the marching even harder.

Even so, in spite of the discomfort, the men were making good time until the disease struck. And that stopped them in their tracks.

What the disease was or how it was spread is unknown and unknowable at this late date. Virus or bacterium, amoeba or fungus—whatever it was, it struck.

Symptoms: Lassitude, weariness, weakness, and pain.

Signs: Great, ulcerous, wartlike, blood-filled blisters that grew rapidly over the body.

A man might go to sleep at night feeling reasonably tired, but not ill, and wake up in the morning to find himself unable to rise, his muscles too weak to lift him from his bed.

If the blisters broke, or were lanced, it was almost impossible to stop the bleeding, and many died, not from the toxic effect of the disease itself, but from simple loss of blood.

But, like many epidemics, the thing had a fairly short life span. After two weeks, it had burned itself out. Most of those who got it recovered, and a few were evidently immune.

Eighteen men remained behind in shallow graves.

The rest went on.

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X

No man is perfect. Even with four decades of training behind him, Commander Frank couldn't call the turn every time. After the first few villages, there were no further battles. The natives, having seen what the invaders could do, simply showed up missing when the commander and his men arrived. The villages were empty by the time the column reached the outskirts.

Frater Vincent, the agent of the Universal Assembly, complained in no uncertain terms about this state of affairs.

"As you know, commander," he said frowningly one morning, "it's no use trying to indoctrinate a people we can't contact. And you can't subject a people by force of arms alone; the power of the Truth—"

"I know, Frater," the commander interposed quickly. "But we can't deal with these savages in the hinterlands. When we get a little farther into this barbarian empire, we can take the necessary steps to—"

"The Truth," Frater Vincent interrupted somewhat testily, "is for all men. It works, regardless of the state of civilization of the society."

The commander looked out of the unglazed window of the native hut in which he had established his temporary headquarters, in one of the many villages he had taken—or, rather, walked into without a fight because it was empty. "But you'll admit, Frater, that it takes longer with savages."

"True," said Frater Vincent.

"We simply haven't the time. We've got to keep on the move. And, besides, we haven't even been able to contact any of the natives for quite a while; they get out of our way. And we have taken a few prisoners—" His voice was apologetic, but there was a trace of irritation in it. He didn't want to offend Frater Vincent, of course, but dammit, the Assemblyman didn't understand military tactics at all. Or, he corrected himself hastily, at least only slightly.

"Yes," admitted Frater Vincent, "and I've had considerable success with the prisoners. But, remember—we're not here just to indoctrinate a few occasional prisoners, but to change the entire moral and philosophical viewpoint of an entire race."

"I realize that, Frater," the commander admitted. He turned from the window and faced the Assemblyman. "We're getting close to the Great Bay now. That's where our ship landed on the second probing expedition. I expect we'll be more welcome there than we have been, out here in the countryside. We'll take it easy, and I think you'll have a chance to work with the natives on a mass basis."

The Frater smiled. "Excellent, commander. I . . . uh . . . want you to understand that I'm not trying to tell you your business; you run this campaign as you see fit. But don't lose sight of the ultimate goal of life."

"I won't. How could I? It's just

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that my methods are not, perhaps, as refined as yours."

Frater Vincent nodded, still smiling. "True. You are a great deal more direct. And—in your own way—just as effective. After all, the Assembly could not function without the military, but there were armies long before the Universal Assembly came into being."

The commander smiled back. "Not any armies like this, Frater."

Frater Vincent nodded. The understanding between the two men—at least on that point—was tacit and mutual. He traced a symbol in the air and left the commander to his thoughts.

Mentally, the commander went through the symbol-patterns that he had learned as a child—the symbol-patterns that brought him into direct contact with the Ultimate Power, the Power that controlled not only the spinning of atoms and the whirling of electrons in their orbits, but the workings of probability itself.

Once indoctrinated into the teachings of the Universal Assembly, any man could tap that Power to a greater or lesser degree, depending on his mental control and ethical attitude. At the top level, a first-class adept could utilize that Power for telepathy, psychokinesis, levitation, teleportation, and other powers that the commander only vaguely understood.

He, himself, had no such depth of mind, such iron control over his will, and he knew he'd never have it. But he could and did tap that Power to the extent that his physical body was under near-perfect control at all times, and not even the fear of death could shake his determination to win or his great courage.

He turned again to the window and looked at the alien sky. There was a great deal yet to be done.

The commander needed information—needed it badly. He had to know what the government of the alien empire was doing. Had they been warned of his arrival? Surely they must have, and yet they had taken no steps to impede his progress.

For this purpose, he decided to set up headquarters on an island just offshore in the Great Bay. It was a protected position, easily defended from assault, and the natives, he knew from his previous visit, were friendly.

They even helped him to get his men and equipment and the carriers across on huge rafts.

From that point, he began collecting the information he needed to invade the central domains of the Greatest Noble himself. It seemed an ideal spot—not only protection-wise, but because this was the spot he had originally picked for the landing of the ship. The vessel, which had returned to the base for reinforcements and extra supplies, would be aiming for the Great Bay area when she came back. And there was little likelihood that atmospheric disturbances would throw her off course again; Captain Bartholomew was too good a man to be fooled twice.

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But landing on that island was the first—and only—mistake the commander made during the campaign. The rumors of internal bickerings among the Great Nobles of the barbarian empire were not the only rumors he heard. News of more local treachery came to his ears through the agency of natives, now loyal to the commander, who had been indoctrinated into the philosophy of the Assembly.

A group of native chieftains had decided that the invading Earthmen were too dangerous to be allowed to remain on their island, in spite of the fact that the invaders had done them no harm. There were, after all, whisperings from the north, whence the invaders had come, that the armored beings with the terrible weapons had used their power more than once during their march to the south. The chieftains were determined to rid their island of the potential menace.

As soon as the matter was brought to the commander's attention, he acted. He sent out a patrol to the place where the ringleaders were meeting, arrested them, and sentenced them to death. He didn't realize what effect that action would have on the rest of the islanders.

He almost found out too late.

XI

"There must be three thousand of them out there," said Lieutenant commander Hernan tightly, "and every one of them's crazy."

"Rot!" The commander spat on the ground and then sighted again along the barrel of his weapon. "I'm the one who's crazy. I'm a lousy politician; that's my trouble."

The lieutenant commander shrugged lightly. "Anyone can make a mistake. Just chalk it up to experience."

"I will, when we get out of this mess." He watched the gathering natives through hard, slitted eyes.

The invading Earthmen were in a village at the southern end of the eight-mile-long island, waiting inside the mud-brick huts while the natives who had surrounded the village worked themselves into a frenzy for an attack. The commander knew there was no sense in charging into them at that point; they would simply scatter and reassemble. The only thing to do was wait until they attacked—and then smash the attack.

"Hernan," he said, his eyes still watching the outside, "you and the others get out there with the carriers after the first volley. Cut them down. They're twenty-to-one against us, so make every blow count. Move."

Hernan nodded wordlessly and slipped away.

The natives were building up their courage with some sort of war dance, whooping and screaming and making threatening gestures toward the embattled invaders. Then the pattern of the dance changed; the islanders whirled to face the mud-brick buildings which housed the invading Earthmen. Suddenly, the dance broke, and the warriors ran in a

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screaming charge, straight for the trapped soldiers.

The commander waited. His own shot would be the signal, and he didn't want the men to fire too quickly. If the islanders were hit too soon, they might fall back into the woods and set up a siege, which the little company couldn't stand. Better to mop up the natives now, if possible.

Closer. Closer—

Now!

The commander's first shot picked off one of the leaders in the front ranks of the native warriors, and was followed by a raking volley from the other power weapons, firing from the windows of the mud-brick buildings. The warriors in the front rank dropped, and those in the second rank had to move adroitly to keep from stumbling over the bodies of their fallen fellows. The firing from the huts became ragged, but its raking effect was still deadly. A cloud of heavy, stinking smoke rolled across the clearing between the edge of the jungle and the village, as the bright, hard lances of heat leaped from the muzzles of the power weapons toward the bodies of the charging warriors.

The charge was gone from the commander's weapon, and he didn't bother to replace it. As Hernan and his men charged into the melee with their carriers, the commander went with them.

At the same time, the armored infantrymen came pouring out of the mud-brick houses, swinging their swords, straight into the mass of confused native warriors. A picked group of sharpshooters remained behind, in the concealment of the huts to pick off the warriors at the edge of the battle with their sporadic fire.

The commander's lips were moving a little as he formed the symbol-patterns of power almost unconsciously; a lifetime of habit had burned them into his brain so deeply that he could form them automatically while turning the thinking part of his mind to the business at hand.

He soon found himself entirely surrounded by the alien warriors. Their bronze weapons glittered in the sunlight as they tried to fight off the onslaught of the invaders. And those same bronze weapons were sheared, nicked, blunted, bent, and broken as they met the harder steel of the commander's sword.

Then the unexpected happened. One of the warriors, braver than the rest, made a grab for the commander's sword arm. At almost the same moment, a warrior on the other side of the carrier aimed a spear thrust at his side.

Either by itself would have been ineffectual. The spear clanged harmlessly from the commander's armor, and the warrior who had attempted to pull him from the carrier died before he could give much of a tug. But the combination, plus the fact that the heavy armor was a little unwieldy, overbalanced him. He toppled to the ground with a clash of

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steel as he and the carrier parted company.

Without a human hand at its controls, the carrier automatically moved away from the mass of struggling fighters and came to a halt well away from the battle.

The commander rolled as he hit and leaped to his feet, his sword moving in flickering arcs around him. The natives had no knowledge of effective swordplay. Like any barbarian, they conceived of a sword as a cutting instrument rather than a thrusting one. They chopped with them, using small shields to protect their bodies as they tried to hack the commander to bits.

But the commander had no desire to become mincemeat just yet. Five of the barbarians were coming at him, their swords raised for a downward slash. The commander lunged forward with a straight stop-thrust aimed at the groin of the nearest one. It came as a complete surprise to the warrior, who doubled up in pain.

The commander had already withdrawn his blade and was attacking the second as the first fell. He made another feint to the groin and then changed the aim of his point as the warrior tried to cover with his shield. A buckler is fine protection against a man who is trying to hack you to death with a chopper, because a heavy cutting sword and a shield have about the same inertia, and thus the same maneuverability. But the shield isn't worth anything against a

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light stabbing weapon. The warrior's shield started downward and he was unable to stop it and reverse its direction before the commander's sword pierced his throat.

Two down, three to go. No, four. Another warrior had decided to join the little battle against the leader of the invading Earthmen.

The commander changed his tactics just slightly with the third man. He slashed with the tip of his blade against the descending sword-arm of his opponent—a short, quick flick of his wrist that sheared through the inside of the wrist, severing tendons, muscles, veins and arteries as it cut to the bone. The sword clanged harmlessly off the commander's shoulder. A quick thrust, and the third man died.

The other three slowed their attack and began circling warily, trying to get behind the commander. Instead of waiting, he charged forward, again cutting at the sword arm of his adversary, severing fingers this time. As the warrior turned, the commander's sword pierced his side.

How long it went on, he had no idea. He kept his legs and his sword-arm moving, and his eyes ever alert for new foes as man after man dropped beneath that snake-tonguing blade. Inside his armor, perspiration poured in rivulets down his skin, and his arms and legs began to ache, but not for one second did he let up. He could not see what was going on, could not tell the direction of the battle nor even allow his mind to wonder what was going on more than ten paces from him.

And then, quite suddenly, it seemed, it was all over. Lieutenant commander Hernan and five other men pulled up with their carriers, as if from nowhere, their weapons dealing death, clearing a space around their commander.

"You hurt?" bawled Hernan.

The commander paused to catch his breath. He knew there was a sword-slash across his face, and his right leg felt as though there was a cut on it, but otherwise—

"I'm all right," he said. "How's it going?"

"They're breaking," Hernan told him. "We'll have them scattered within minutes."

Even as he spoke, the surge of battle moved away from them, toward the forest. The charge of the carriers, wreaking havoc on every side, had broken up the battle formation the aliens had had; the flaming death from the horrible weapons of the invaders, the fearless courage of the foot soldiers, and the steel-clad monsters that were running amuck among them shattered the little discipline they had. Panicky, they lost their anger, which had taken them several hours to build up. They scattered, heading for the forest.

Shortly, the village was silent. Not an alien warrior was to be seen, save for the hundreds of mute corpses that testified to the carnage that had been wrought.

Several of the commander's men had been wounded, and three had

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died. Lieutenant commander Hernan had been severely wounded in the leg by a native javelin, but the injury was a long way from being fatal.

Hernan gritted his teeth while his leg was being bandaged. "The angels were with us on that one," he said between winces.

The commander nodded. "I hope they stick with us. We'll need 'em to get off this island."

XII

For a while, it looked as though they were trapped on the island. The natives didn't dare to attack again, but no hunting party was safe, and the food supply was dropping. They had gotten on the island only by the help of the natives, who had ferried them over on rafts. But getting off was another thing, now that the natives were hostile. Cutting down trees to build rafts might possibly be managed, but during the loading the little company would be too vulnerable to attack.

The commander was seated bleakly in the hut he had taken as his headquarters, trying to devise a scheme for getting to the mainland, when the deadlock was finally broken.

There was a flurry of footsteps outside, a thump of heavy boots as one of the younger officers burst into the room.

"Commander!" he yelled. "Commander! Come outside!"

The commander leaped to his feet. "Another attack?"

"No, sir! Come look!"

The commander strode quickly to the door. His sight followed the line of the young officer's pointing finger.

There, outlined against the blue of the sky, was a ship!

The news from home was encouraging, but it was a long way from being what the commander wanted. Another hundred men and more carriers had been added to the original company of now hardened veterans, and the recruits, plus the protection of the ship's guns, were enough to enable the entire party to leave the island for the mainland.

By this time, the commander had gleaned enough information from the natives to be able to plan the next step in his campaign. The present Greatest Noble, having successfully usurped the throne from his predecessor, was still not in absolute control of the country. He had won a civil war, but his rule was still too shaky to allow him to split up his armies, which accounted for the fact that, thus far, no action had been taken by the Imperial troops against the invading Earthmen.

The commander set up a base on the mainland, near the coast, left a portion of his men there to defend it, and, with the remainder, marched inland to come to grips with the Greatest Noble himself.

As they moved in toward the heart of the barbarian empire, the men noticed a definite change in the degree of civilization of the natives—or, at least, in the degree of tech-

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nological advancement. There were large towns, not small villages, to be dealt with, and there were highways and bridges that showed a knowledge of engineering equivalent to that of ancient Rome.

The engineers of the Empire of the Great Nobles were a long way above the primitive. They could have, had they had any reason to, erected a pyramid the equal of great Khufu's in size, and probably even more neatly constructed. Militarily speaking, the lack of knowledge of iron hampered them, but it must be kept in mind that a well-disciplined and reasonably large army, armed with bronze-tipped spears, bronze swords, axes, and maces, can make a formidable foe, even against a much better equipped group.

The Imperial armies were much better disciplined and much better armed than any of the natives the commander had thus far dealt with, and there were reputed to be more than ten thousand of them with the Greatest Noble in his mountain stronghold. Such considerations prompted the commander to plan his strategy carefully, but they did not deter him in the least. If he had been able to bring aircraft and perhaps a thermonuclear bomb or two for demonstration purposes, the attack might have been less risky, but neither had been available to a man of his limited means, so he had to work without them.

But now, he avoided fighting if at all possible. Working with Frater Vincent, the commander worked to convince the natives on the fertile farms and in the prosperous villages that he and his company were merely ambassadors of good will—missionaries and traders. He and his men had come in peace, and if they were received in peace, well and good. If not . . . well, they still had their weapons.

The commander was depending on the vagueness of the information that may have filtered down from the north. The news had already come that the invaders were fierce and powerful fighters, but the commander gave the impression that the only reason any battles had taken place was because the northern tribes had been truculent in the extreme. He succeeded fairly well; the natives he now met considered their brethren of the northern provinces to be little better than savages, and therefore to be expected to treat strangers inhospitably and bring about their own ruin. The southern citizens of the empire eyed the strangers with apprehension, but they offered very little resistance. The commander and his men were welcomed warily at each town, and, when they left, were bid farewell with great relief.

It took a little time for the commander to locate the exact spot where the Greatest Noble and his retinue were encamped. The real capital of the empire was located even farther south, but the Greatest Noble was staying, for the nonce, in a city nestled high in the mountains, well inland from the seacoast. The commander headed for the mountains.

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The passage into the mountains wasn't easy. The passes were narrow and dangerous, and the weather was cold. The air became thinner at every step. At eight thousand feet, mountain climbing in heavy armor becomes more than just hard work, and at twelve thousand it becomes exhausting torture. But the little company went on, sparked, fueled, and driven by the personal force of their commander, who stayed in the vanguard, his eyes ever alert for treachery from the surrounding mountains.

When the surprise came, it was of an entirely different kind than he had expected. The commander's carrier came over a little rise, and he brought it to an abrupt halt as he saw the valley spread out beneath him. He left the carrier, walked over to a boulder near the edge of the cliff, and looked down at the valley.

It was an elongated oval of verdant green, fifteen miles long by four wide, looking like an emerald set in the rocky granite of the surrounding peaks that thrust upward toward the sky. The valley ran roughly north-and-south, and to his right, at the southern end, the commander could see a city, although it was impossible to see anyone moving in it at this distance.

To his left, he could see great clouds of billowing vapor that rolled across the grassy plain—evidently steam from the volcanic hot springs which he had been told were to be found in this valley.

But, for the moment, it was neither the springs nor the city that interested him most.

In the heart of the valley, spreading over acre after acre, were the tents and pavilions of a mighty army encampment. From the looks of it, the estimate of thirty thousand troops which had been given him by various officials along the way was, if anything, too small.

It was a moment that might have made an ordinary man stop to think, and, having thought, to turn and go. But the commander was no ordinary man, and the sheer remorseless courage that had brought him this far wouldn't allow him to turn back. So far, he had kept the Greatest Noble off balance with his advancing tactics; if he started to retreat, the Greatest Noble would realize that the invaders were not invincible, and would himself advance to crush the small band of strangers.

The Greatest Noble had known the commander and his men were coming; he was simply waiting, to find out what they were up to, confident that he could dispose of them at his leisure. The commander knew that, and he knew he couldn't retreat now. There was no decision to be made, really—only planning to be done.

He turned back from the boulder to face the officers who had come to take a look at the valley.

"We'll go to the city first," he said.

XIII

The heavy tread of the invaders'

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boots as they entered the central plaza of the walled city awakened nothing but echoes from the stone walls that surrounded the plaza. Like the small villages they had entered farther north, the city seemed devoid of life.

There is nothing quite so depressing and threatening as a deserted city. The windows in the walls of the buildings seemed like blank, darkened eyes that watched—and waited. Nothing moved, nothing made a sound, except the troopers themselves.

The men kept close to the walls; there was no point in bunching up in the middle of the square to be cut down by arrows from the windows of the upper floors.

The commander ordered four squads of men to search the buildings and smoke out anyone who was there, but they turned up nothing. The entire city was empty. And there were no traps, no ambushes—nothing.

The commander, with Lieutenant commander Hernan and another officer, climbed to the top of the central building of the town. In the distance, several miles away, they could see the encampment of the monarch's troops.

"The only thing we can do," the commander said, his face hard and determined, "is to call their bluff. You two take about three dozen men and go out there with the carriers and give them a show. Go right into camp, as if you owned the place. Throw a scare into them, but don't hurt anyone. Then, very politely, tell the Emperor, or whatever he calls himself, that I would like him to come here for dinner and a little talk."

The two officers looked at each other, then at the commander.

"Just like that?" asked Hernan.

"Just like that," said the commander.

The demonstration and exhibition went well—as far as it had gone. The native warriors had evidently been quite impressed by the onslaught of the terrifying monsters that had thundered across the plain toward them, right into the great camp, and come to a dead halt directly in front of the magnificent pavilion of the Greatest Noble himself.

The Greatest Noble put up a good face. He had obviously been expecting the visitors, because he and his lesser nobles were lined up before the pavilion, the Greatest Noble ensconced on a sort of portable throne. He managed to look perfectly calm and somewhat bored by the whole affair, and didn't seem to be particularly effected at all when Lieutenant commander Hernan bowed low before him and requested his presence in the city.

And the Greatest Noble's answer was simple and to the point, although it was delivered by one of his courtiers.

"You may tell your commander," said the noble, "that His Effulgence must attend to certain religious

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duties tonight, since he is also High Priest of the Sun. However, His Effulgence will most graciously deign to speak to your commander tomorrow. In the meantime, you are requested to enjoy His Effulgence's gracious hospitality in the city, which has been emptied for your convenience. It is yours, for the nonce."

Which left nothing for the two officers and their men to do but go thundering back across the plain to the city.

The Greatest Noble did not bring his whole army with him, but the pageant of barbaric splendor that came tootling and drumming its way into the city the next evening was a magnificent sight. His Effulgence himself was dressed in a scarlet robe and a scarlet, turbanlike head covering with scarlet fringes all around it. About his throat was a necklace of emerald-green gems, and his clothing was studded with more of them. Gold gleamed everywhere. He was borne on an ornate, gilded palanquin, carried high above the crowd on the shoulders of a dozen stalwart nobles, only slightly less gorgeously-dressed than the Greatest Noble. The nobility that followed was scarcely less showy in its finery.

When they came into the plaza, however, the members of the procession came to a halt. The singing and music died away.

The plaza was absolutely empty.

No one had come out to greet the Emperor.

There were six thousand natives in the plaza, and not a sign of the invaders.

The commander, hiding well back in the shadows in one of the rooms of the central building, watched through the window and noted the evident consternation of the royal entourage with satisfaction. Frater Vincent, standing beside him, whispered, "Well?"

"All right," the commander said softly, "they've had a taste of what we got when we came in. I suppose they've had enough. Let's go out and act like hosts."

The commander and a squad of ten men, along with Frater Vincent, strode majestically out of the door of the building and walked toward the Greatest Noble. They had all polished their armor until it shone, which was about all they could do in the way of finery, but they evidently looked quite impressive in the eyes of the natives.

"Greetings, Your Effulgence," said the commander, giving the Greatest Noble a bow that was hardly five degrees from the perpendicular. "I trust we find you well."

In the buildings surrounding the square, hardly daring to move for fear the clank of metal on metal might give the whole plan away, the remaining members of the company watched the conversation between their commander and the Greatest Noble. They couldn't hear what was being said, but that didn't matter; they knew what to do as soon as the commander gave the signal. Every

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eye was riveted on the commander's right hand.

It seemed an eternity before the commander casually reached up to his helmet and brushed a hand across it—once—twice—three times.

Then all hell broke loose. The air was split by the sound of power weapons throwing their lances of flame into the massed ranks of the native warriors. The gunners, safe behind the walls of the buildings, poured a steady stream of accurately directed fire into the packed mob, while the rest of the men charged in with their blades, thrusting and slashing as they went.

The aliens, panic-stricken by the sudden, terrifying assault, tried to run, but there was nowhere to run to. Every exit had been cut off to bottle up the Imperial cortege. Within minutes, the entrances to the square were choked with the bodies of those who tried to flee.

As soon as the firing began, the commander and his men began to make their way toward the Greatest Noble. They had been forced to stand a good five yards away during the parlay, cut off from direct contact by the Imperial guards. The commander, sword in hand, began cutting his way through to the palanquin.

The palanquin bearers seemed frozen; they couldn't run, they couldn't fight, and they didn't dare drop their precious cargo.

The commander's voice bellowed out over the carnage. "Take him prisoner! I'll personally strangle the idiot who harms him!" And then he was too busy to yell.

Two members of the Greatest Noble's personal guard came for him, swords out, determined to give their lives, if necessary, to preserve the sacred life of their monarch. And give them they did.

The commander's blade lashed out once, sliding between the ribs of the first guard. He toppled and almost took the sword with him, but the commander wrenched it free in time to parry the downward slash of the second guard's bronze sword. It was a narrow thing, because the bronze sword, though of softer stuff than the commander's steel, was also heavier, and thus hard to deflect. As it sang past him, the commander swung a chop at the man's neck, cutting it halfway through. He stepped quickly to one side to avoid the falling body and thrust his blade through a third man, who was aiming a blow at the neck of one of the commander's officers. There were only a dozen feet separating the commander from his objective, the palanquin of the Greatest Noble, but he had to wade through blood to get there.

The palanquin itself was no longer steady. Three of the twelve nobles who had been holding it had already fallen, and there were two of the commander's men already close enough to touch the royal person, but they were too busy fighting to make any attempt to grab him. The Greatest Noble, unarmed, could only huddle in his seat, terrified, but it

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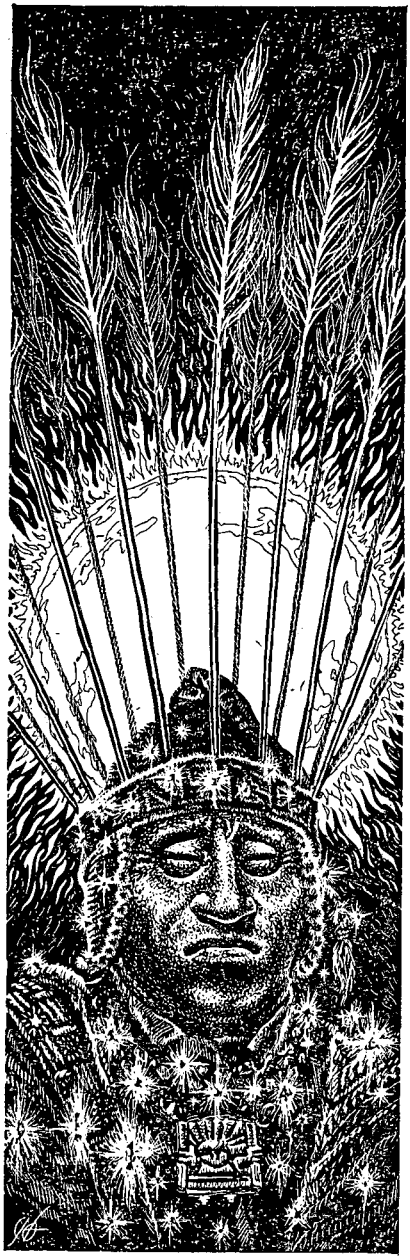

would take more than two men to snatch him from his bodyguard. The commander fought his way in closer.

Two more of the palanquin bearers went down, and the palanquin itself began to topple. The Greatest Noble screamed as he fell toward the commander.

One of the commander's men spun around as he heard the scream so close to him, and, thinking that the Greatest Noble was attacking his commander, lunged out with his blade.

It was almost a disaster. Moving quickly, the commander threw out his left arm to deflect the sword. He succeeded, but he got a bad slash across his hand for his trouble.

He yelled angrily at the surprised soldier, not caring what he said. Meanwhile, the others of the squad, seeing that the Greatest Noble had fallen, hurried to surround him. Two minutes later, the Greatest Noble was a prisoner, being half carried, half led into the central building by four of the men, while the remaining six fought a rear-guard action to hold off the native warriors who were trying to rescue the sacred person of the Child of the Sun.

Once inside, the Greatest Noble was held fast while the doors were swung shut.

Outside, the slaughter went on. All the resistance seemed to go out of the warriors when they saw their sacred monarch dragged away by the invading Earthmen. It was every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost. And the Devil, in the

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form of the commander's troops, certainly did.

Within half an hour after it had begun, the butchery was over. More than three thousand of the natives had died, and an unknown number more badly wounded. Those who had managed to get out and get away from the city kept on going. They told the troops who had been left outside what had happened, and a mass exodus from the valley began.

Safely within the fortifications of the central building, the commander allowed himself one of his rare grins of satisfaction. Not a single one of his own men had been killed, and the only wound which had been sustained by anyone in the company was the cut on his own hand. Still smiling, he went into the room where the Greatest Noble, dazed and shaken, was being held by two of the commander's men. The commander bowed—this time, very low.

"I believe, Your Effulgence, that we have an appointment for dinner. Come, the banquet has been laid."

And, as though he were still playing the gracious host, the commander led the half-paralyzed Child of the Sun to the room where the banquet had been put on a table in perfect diplomatic array.

"Your Effulgence may sit at my right hand," said the commander pleasantly.

XIV

As MacDonald said of Robert Wilson, "This is not an account of how Boosterism came to Arcadia." It's a devil of a long way from it. And once the high point of a story has been reached and passed, it is pointless to prolong it too much. The capture of the Greatest Noble broke the power of the Empire of the Great Nobles forever. The loyal subjects were helpless without a leader, and the disloyal ones, near the periphery of the Empire, didn't care. The crack Imperial troops simply folded up and went home. The Greatest Noble went on issuing orders, and they were obeyed; the people were too used to taking orders from authority to care whether they were really the Greatest Noble's own idea or not.

In a matter of months, two hundred men had conquered an empire, with a loss of thirty-five or forty men. Eventually, they had to execute the old Greatest Noble and put his more tractable nephew on the throne, but that was a mere incident.

Gold? It flowed as though there were an endless supply. The commander shipped enough back on the first load to make them all wealthy.

The commander didn't go back home to spend his wealth amid the luxuries of the Imperial court, even though Emperor Carl appointed him to the nobility. That sort of thing wasn't the commander's meat. There, he would be a fourth-rate noble; here, he was the Imperial Viceroy, responsible only to the distant Emperor. There, he would be nothing; here, he was almost a king.

Two years after the capture of the

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Greatest Noble, he established a new capital on the coast and named it Kingston. And from Kingston he ruled with an iron hand.

As has been intimated, this was *not* Arcadia. A year after the founding of Kingston, the old capital was attacked, burned, and almost fell under siege, due to a sudden uprising of the natives under the new Greatest Noble, who had managed to escape. But the uprising collapsed because of the approach of the planting season; the warriors had to go back home and plant their crops or the whole of the agriculture-based country would starve—except the invading Earthmen.

Except in a few instances, the natives were never again any trouble.

But the commander—now the Viceroy—had not seen the end of his troubles.

He had known his limitations, and realized that the governing of a whole planet—or even one continent—was too much for one man when the population consists primarily of barbarians and savages. So he had delegated the rule of a vast area to the south to another—a Lieutenant commander James, known as "One-Eye," a man who had helped finance the original expedition, and had arrived after the conquest.

One-Eye went south and made very small headway against the more barbaric tribes there. He did not become rich, and he did not achieve anywhere near the success that the Viceroy had. So he came back north with his army and decided to unseat the Viceroy and take his place. That was five years after the capture of the Greatest Noble.

One-Eye took Center City, the old capital, and started to work his way northward, toward Kingston. The Viceroy's forces met him at a place known as Salt Flats and thoroughly trounced him. He was captured, tried for high treason, and executed.

One would think that the execution ended the threat of Lieutenant commander James, but not so. He had a son, and he had had followers.

XV

Nine years. Nine years since the breaking of a vast empire. It really didn't seem like it. The Viceroy looked at his hands. They were veined and thin, and the callouses were gone. Was he getting soft, or just getting old? A little bit—no, a *great deal* of both.

He sat in his study, in the Viceregal Palace at Kingston, chewing over the events of the past weeks. Twice, rumors had come that he was to be assassinated. He and two of his councilors had been hanged in effigy in the public square not long back. He had been snubbed publicly by some of the lesser nobles.

Had he ruled harshly, or was it just jealousy? And was it, really, as some said, caused by the Southerners and the followers of Young Jim?

He didn't know. And sometimes, it seemed as if it didn't matter.

Here he was, sitting alone in his

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study, when he should have gone to a public function. And he had stayed because of fear of assassination.

Was it—

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

A servant entered. "Sir Martin is here, my lord."

The Viceroy got to his feet. "Show him in, by all means."

Sir Martin, just behind the servant, stepped in, smiling, and the Viceroy returned his smile. "Well, everything went off well enough without you," said Sir Martin.

"Any sign of trouble?"

"None, my lord; none whatsoever. The—"

"Damn!" the Viceroy interrupted savagely. "I should have known! What have I done but display my cowardice? I'm getting yellow in my old age!"

Sir Martin shook his head. "Cowardice, my lord? Nothing of the sort. Prudence, I should call it. By the by, the judge and a few others are coming over." He chuckled softly. "We thought we might talk you out of a meal."

The Viceroy grinned widely. "Nothing easier. I suspected all you hangers-on would come around for your handouts. Come along, my friend; we'll have a drink before the others get here."

There were nearly twenty people at dinner, all, presumably, friends of the Viceroy. At least, it is certain that they were friends in so far as they had no part in the assassination plot. It was a gay party; the Viceroy's friends were doing their best to cheer him up, and were succeeding pretty well. One of the nobles, known for his wit, had just essayed a somewhat off-color jest, and the others were roaring with laughter at the punch line when a shout rang out.

There was a sudden silence around the table.

"What was that?" asked someone. "What did—"

"Help!" There was the sound of footsteps pounding up the stairway from the lower floor.

"Help! The Southerners have come to kill the Viceroy!"

From the sounds, there was no doubt in any of the minds of the people seated around the table that the shout was true. For a moment, there was shock. Then panic took over.

There were only a dozen or so men in the attacking party; if the "friends" of the Viceroy had stuck by him, they could have held off the assassins with ease.

But no one ran to lock the doors that stood between the Viceroy and his enemies, and only a few drew their weapons to defend him. The others fled. Getting out of a window from the second floor of a building isn't easy, but fear can lend wings, and, although none of them actually flew down, the retreat went fast enough.

Characteristically, the Viceroy headed, not for the window, but for his own room, where his armor—long unused, except for state func-

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tions—hung waiting in the closet. With him went Sir Martin.

But there wasn't even an opportunity to get into the armor. The rebel band charged into the hallway that led to the bedroom, screaming: *"Death to the Tyrant! Long live the Emperor!"*

It was personal anger, then, not rebellion against the Empire which had appointed the ex-commander to his post as Viceroy.

"Where is the Viceroy? Death to the Tyrant!" The assassins moved in.

Swords in hand, and cloaks wrapped around their left arms, Sir Martin and the Viceroy moved to meet the oncoming attackers.

"Traitors!" bellowed the Viceroy. "Cowards! Have you come to kill me in my own house?"

Parry, thrust! Parry, thrust! Two of the attackers fell before the snake-tongue blade of the fighting Viceroy. Sir Martin accounted for two more before he fell in a flood of his own blood.

The Viceroy was alone, now. His blade flickered as though inspired, and two more died under its tireless onslaught. Even more would have died if the head of the conspiracy, a supporter of Young Jim named Rada, hadn't pulled a trick that not even the Viceroy would have pulled.

Rada grabbed one of his own men and shoved him toward the Viceroy's sword, impaling the hapless man upon that deadly blade.

And, in the moment while the Viceroy's weapon was buried to the hilt in an enemy's body, the others leaped around the dying man and ran their blades through the Viceroy.

He dropped to the floor, blood gushing from half a dozen wounds.

Even so, his fighting heart still had seconds more to beat. As he propped himself up on one arm, the assassins stood back; even they recognized that they had killed something bigger and stronger than they. A better man than any of them lay dying at their feet.

He clawed with one hand at the river of red that flowed from his pierced throat and then fell forward across the stone floor. With his crimson hand, he traced the great symbol of his Faith on the stone—the Sign of the Cross. He bent his head to kiss it, and, with a final cry of *"Jesus!"* he died. At the age of seventy, it had taken a dozen men to kill him with treachery, something all the hell of nine years of conquest and rule had been unable to do.

And thus died Francisco Pizarro, the Conqueror of Peru.

THE END

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INSTINCT

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BY GEORGE O. SMITH

You can keep a good man down, if you've got enough headstart, are alert and persistent... so long as he limits himself to acting like a good man....

Illustrated by Martinez

IT WAS 047-63-10 when he opened the door. Before his superior could chew him for prepunctuality, Huvane said as the chief looked up and opened his mouth to start:

"Sorry, but you should know. Terra is at it again."

Chelan's jaw snapped shut. He passed a hand over his face and asked in a tone of pure exasperation. "The same?" and as Huvane nodded, Chelan went on, "Why can't they make a mistake and blow themselves out of our hair? How far did they get this time?"

"All the way."

"And out?"

Huvane sat down shaking his head slowly. "Not yet, but they're over the hump, you know." Huvane's face brightened ever so slightly. "I can't be criticized for not counting them, chief. But I'll estimate that there must be at least a couple of hundred atoms of 109 already. And you know that nobody could *make* 109 if they hadn't already evolved methods of measuring the properties of individual atoms. So as soon as they find that their boom-sample doesn't behave like the standard mess out of a bombardment chamber, they won't rest until they find out why. They'll find out. Then it'll be 109, 109, 109 until we're forced to clobber them again."

Bitterly Chelan looked up. "I don't think I need the lecture. I admire their tenacity. I admire their ambition. I admire their blasphemous, consignatory, obscenity attitude of acting as if the Great Creator had

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concocted the whole glorious Universe for their own playground. Yes," said the chief wearily, "singly they aren't bad traits. Boiled down into the self-esteem of a single race, I don't admire them any more. I'm simply scared."

"Yeah. Well, we've got time."

"Not much. What's their space potential this time?"

"Still scragged on the mass-inertia-relativity barrier. Tailburners . . . er, chemical reaction engines. Manned and unmanned orbital flights. Half a dozen landings on their sister planet. No," said Huvane as he saw the chief's puzzlement, "I don't mean Number Two . . . the one they call Venus this time. I mean their co-orbital companion. *The* Moon. They still call it that."

The chief looked up wonderingly. "Do you suppose," he asked solemnly, "that there is really something called a 'racial memory'?"

"It's against all the theory," objected Huvane. "But there seems to be—" his voice trailed off absently. It returned after some thought: "I've tried to sort it out, just as if I were one of them. The recurrence of their . . . er . . . 'names of antiquity' as they call them, seem to recur and recur. Their Planet Two, now called Venus, was called Astarte last time, and before that it was Ishtar."

"Other way around."

"No matter. The names are still being used and, according to their belief, merely parallel names culled out of local pagan religious beliefs."

The chief nodded. "That's only part of the parallelism. The big thing is the way they follow the same pattern. Savage, agrarian, urban, right on up the ladder according to the rules of civic science but squabbling and battling all the way right on up and out into space. Hell, Huvane, warfare and conflict I can both understand and cope with, but not the Terran flavor. They don't come out bent on conquest or stellar colonialism. They come out with their little private fight still going on and each side lines up its volume of influence and pits one against the other until the whole section of that spiral arm is glittering like a sputtering spark along a train of black powder. I wish," he said savagely, "that we could cut off that arm and fling it deep into extragalactic space."

Huvane shook his head. "And leave the problem for our children to solve?"

"They'll have one to solve, I think," said Chelan. "In another twenty thousand years the Terrans will be right back doing business at the same old stand. Unless we can solve it for once and for all right now."

Huvane looked around as if he were seeking another door to the chief's office. "How?" he asked sarcastically. "The first time we greeted them and they took both our welcome and us for everything they could before we pulled the rug out from under them. The second time we boxed them off and they broke

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out after converting the isolation screen into an offensive weapon. The third time we tried to avoid them and they ran wild exploiting less-ambitious races. The fourth time we missed the boat and they were chewing at our back door before we knew about them; containing them was almost a nova job. The fifth time we went in and tried to understand them, they traded us two for one. Two things they didn't want for one they did," Huvane's lips curled, "and I'm not sure that they didn't trade us the other way around; two they needed for one they declared useless. Sixth? that was the last time and they just came out shooting as if the whole galaxy automatically objected. This time? Who knows?" Huvane sat down again and put his hands between his knees.

"They don't operate like *people.* Sensible folk settle their own problems, then look for more. Terra? One half of the globe is against the other half of the globe. Fighting one another tooth and nail, they still find time to invent and cross space to other planets and continue their fight on unknown territory."

"Maybe we'd better just admit that we don't know the solution. Then we can clobber Terra back to the swamp, juggle the place into another ice age, put the details down in History, and hope that our remote progeny will be smarter than we."

"Like maybe we're smarter than our remote ancestors?" jeered Huvane.

"Got a better idea?"

"Maybe. Has anybody really taken a couple of them and *analyzed* them?"

"It's inhumane."

"I agree, but—?"

"Get me a healthy, well-balanced specimen of somewhat better-than-average education and training. Can do?"

"Can do. But how are you going to keep him?"

"I don't intend to study him like I'd study a bug under a microscope. This one won't get away. Make it in fourteen versaids, Huvane."

"Make it in ten plus or minus a radite or two. So long!"

The beast at Cape Canaveral stood three hundred and fifteen feet tall dwarfing her creators into microscopic proportions. Swarming up and down the gantry, bug-sized humans crawled in and out of check ports with instrument checks, hauling hoses, cables, lines. Some thousand feet away, a puff-bomb of red smoke billowed out and a habit-flattened voice announced: "At the mark, X Minus Fifteen Minutes . . . . . Mark! X Minus Fifteen Minutes!"

Jerry Markham said, "That's me!" He looked up at the lofty porthole and almost lost his balance over backwards sighting it. He was a healthy specimen, about twenty-four and full of life. He had spent the day going through two routines that were sometimes simultaneous and at other times serially; one re-stating his instructions letter by letter including the various alternatives and

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contingencies that involved his making decisions if the conditions on Venus were according to this theory or that. The other was a rigorous medical checkup. Neither of them showed that Jerry Markham had spent the previous night in activities not recommended by his superiors but nothing that would bounce him if they knew. He could hardly be broken for living it up at a party.

He shook hands with the boss and stepped into the elevator. It was not his idea of a proper send-off. There should be bands playing and girls throwing paper tape, flowers and a few drinks. Sally should send him off with a proud smooch of lipstick and a tearful promise to wait. Instead it was all very military and strict and serious—which is why he'd whooped it up the night before. He'd had his good night and good by with Sally Forman, but now eighteen hours later he was fit and raring for a return match.

Jerry's mind was by no means concerned with this next half hour, which would be the most perilous part of his flight. Tomorrow would take care of itself. The possibility that thirty minutes from now he might be dead in a flaming pyre did not cross his mind, the chance that an hour from now he could be told that his bird was off-course and his fate starvation if it obtained an untrue orbit or abrupt destruction if it didn't orbit at all—nothing bothered him.

He sat there chanting the count down with the official timer and braced himself when the call came: "Zero! Fire!"

Inwardly, Jerry Markham's mind said, "We're off!" and he began to look forward to his landing on Venus. Not the problems of landing, but what he would find there when he soared down through the clouds.

Determined to hold up through the high-G even though nobody watched, he went on and on and up and up, his radio voiced the progress tinnily. Shock followed roaring pressure, release followed shock. Orientation was lost; only logic and intellect told him where he was and which way he was going.

Then he was free. Free to eat and drink and read and smoke one cigarette every three hours and, in essence, behave in about the same way as a prisoner confined in solitary. The similarity did not bother Jerry Markham, for this was honor, not punishment.

Huvane collected him with the ease of a fisherman landing a netted crab. Easily, painlessly. Shockingly, for the crab doesn't exactly take to the net with docility.

Huvane collected the whole shebang, man and machinery; then opened the spacecraft with the same attitude as a man peeling the lid from a can of sardines. He could have breached the air lock, but he wanted the Terran to understand the power behind the act.

Jerry Markham came out blinking; very mildly wondering about the air. It was good. Without considering the

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rather high probability that nobody spoke the language, he blurted:

"What gives?"

He was not very much surprised when one of them in uniform said curtly, "This way and make it snappy, Terran!"

No, he was not surprised. He was too stunned to permit anything as simple as surprise. And through the shock and the stun, his months of training came through. Jerry Markham worried his first worry: *How was he going to get the word back home?*

Confinement in the metal cell of his top-stage hadn't bothered him. The concept of landing on a planet that couldn't come closer to home than some twenty-seven million miles was mere peanuts. Isolation for a year was no more than a hiatus, a period of adventure that would be rewarded many-fold. Sally? So she might not wait but there were others; he'd envisioned himself fighting them off with a club after his successful return. Hell, they'd swarmed him before his take-off, starting with the moment his number had come up as possible candidate.

No, the meeting with competence in space did not shock him greatly. What bothered him was his lack of control over the situation. Had he seen them and passed on about his business, he recounted the incident.

As it was, his desire to tell somebody about it was cut off. As he sat, alone and helpless, it occurred to him that he did not mind so much the dying, if that was to be his lot. What mattered was the unmarked grave. The mourning did not move him; the physical concept of "grave" and its fill of moldering organic substances was nothing. It was mere symbol. So long as people knew how and where, it made little difference to Jerry Markham whether he was planted in a duridium casket guaranteed to preserve the dead flesh for a thousand years or whether he went out in a bright swift flame that glinted in its tongues of the color-traces of incandescent elements of human organic chemistry.

So long as people knew. Where and how. Vague, vague, mass-volumized concept. Granite tomb was one idea, here was a *place*. Point a spread-fingered hand in a waving sweep across the sky that encompasses the Plane of The Ecliptic and say, "It is there," and another *place* is identified. Lost on Venus is no more than a phrase; from Terra Haute or Times Square, Venus is a tiny point in the sky smaller to the vision than the granite of Grant's Tomb.

Imagination breeds irritation. Would they call it pilot error or equipment unreliability? Dying he could face. Goofing would be a disgrace that he would have to meet in fact or in symbol. Hardware crackup was a matter of the laws of probability. Not only his duty demanded that he report, his essence cried out for a voice to *let them know.*

Anybody.

Just the chance to tell one other human soul.

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Chelan asked, "Who are you? Your name and rank?"

He said sullenly, "Go to hell."

"We have ways and means."

He said, "Use 'em."

"If we said that we mean no harm; if we asked what we could do to prove it, what would be your reply?"

"Take me back and let me go."

"Who are you? Will you identify yourself?"

"No."

"Stubborn Terran!"

"I know my rights. We are not at war. I'll tell you nothing. Why did you capture me?"

"We'll ask the questions, Terran."

"You'll get no answers." He sneered at them angrily. "Torture me—and then wonder whether my screamings tell the truth. Dope me and wonder whether what I truly believe is fact or fantasy."

"Please," said Chelan, "we only want to understand your kind. To know what makes you tick."

"Then why didn't you ask?"

"We've tried and we get no answers. Terran, the Universe is a vastness beyond comprehension. Co-operate and give us what we want to know and a piece of it is yours."

"Nuts!"

"Terran, you have friends."

"Who doesn't?"

"Why can't we be your friends?"

Angrily, resentfully, "Your way isn't friendly enough to convince me."

Chelan shook his head. "Take him away," he directed in his own tongue.

"Where? And how shall we keep him?"

"To the place we've prepared. And keep him safe."

Huvane asked, "Safe? Who knows what is safe? One bribed his guards. One seduced her guards. One dug his way out scratch by scratch. Disappeared, died, dead, gone, mingled off with the myriad of worlds—did one get home, perhaps, to start their legend of the gods in the sky; the legend that never dies through the rise and fall of culture from savagery to . . . to . . . to Element 109?"

Chelan looked at Jerry Markham, the Terran looked back defiantly as if he were guest instead of captive. "Co-operate," breathed Chelan.

"I'll tell you nothing. Force me. I can't stop that."

Chelan shook his head sorrowfully. "Extracting what you know would be less than the play of a child," he said. "No, Terran. We can know what you know in the turn of a dial. What we need is that which you do not know. Laugh? Or is that a sneer? No matter. What you know is worthless. Your problems and your ambitions, both racial and personal, are minor. We know them already. The pattern is repetitive, only some of the names are changed.

"But why? Ah, that we must know. Why are you what you are? Seven times in History Terra has come up from the mud, seven times along the same route. Seven times a history of ten thousand years from savage to savant, from beast to brilliance and always with the same will

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to do—to do what? To die for what? To fight for what?"

Chelan waved Huvane to take the Terran away.

Huvane said, "He's locked in air-tight with guards who can be trusted. Now what do we do with him?"

"He will co-operate."

"By force?"

"No, Huvane. By depriving him of the one thing that Life cannot exist without."

"Food? Safety?"

Chelan shook his head. "More primitive than these." He lowered his voice. "He suffers now from being cut off from his kind. Life starts, complaining about the treatment it receives during the miracle of birth and crying for its first breath of air. Life departs gasping for air, with someone listening for the last words, the last message from the dying. Communication, Huvane, is the primary drive of all Life, from plant to animal to man—and if such exists, superman.

"Through communication Life goes on. Communication is the prime requisite to procreation. The firefly signals his mate by night, the human male entices his woman with honeyed words and is not the gift of a jewel a crystalline, enduring statement of his undying affection?"

Chelan dropped his flowery manner and went on in a more casual vein: "Huvane, boil it down to the least attractive form of simplification, no life stands alone. And no viable life goes on without communication. I shall shut off the Terran's communication."

"Then he will go rank staring, raving mad."

"No, for I shall offer him the alterative. Co-operate, or molder in utter blankness."

Huvane shrugged. "Seems to me that any Terran locked in a duralim cell so far from home the distance means nothing is already cut from communication."

"Deeper, deeper, Huvane. The brain lies prisoner within a cell of bone. Its contact with the Outside world lies along five channels of sensory communication. Everything that the brain believes about the Universe is the product of sensory information carried inward by sight, touch, sound, taste and smell. From five basic bits of information, knowledge of the Great Truth is formed through logic and self-argument. Everything."

"But—"

"Oh, now stop. I am not expressing my own singular opinion. I believe a rather great proportion of the things that I was taught, and I was taught through the self-same five sensory channel."

"Um-m-m."

"Good. Just plain 'Um-m-m.' Now we shall shut off the Terran's channels of communication until he consents as an alternative. This, Huvane, hasn't been tried before. It may bring us the final important bit of information."

Slowly the lights went out. Jerry

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Markham was prepared for dark isolation, he could do nothing about it so he accepted it by the simple process of assuring himself that things were going to get worse before they got better.

The darkness became—absolute. Utter. Complete. Not even the dots and whorls and specks that are technically called "Visual noise" occurred. A level of mental alertness niggled at him; for nearly twenty-four years it had been a busy little chunk of his mind. It was that section that inspected the data for important program material and decided which was trivial and which was worthy of the Big Boy's attention. Now it was out of a job because there wasn't even a faint background count of plateau-noise to occupy its attention.

The silence grew—vast. Brain said that the solid walls were no more than ten feet from him; ears said that he was in the precise middle of absolutely nowhere. Feeling said that the floor was under his feet, ears said that upward pressure touched his soles. Deeper grew the deadening of his ears; and orientation was lost. Feeling remained and he felt his heart beating in a hunting rhythm because the sound-feedback through the ear was gone, and the hortator had lost his audible beat.

Feeling died and he knew not whether he stood or sat or floated askew. Feeling died and with it went that delicate motor control that directs the position of muscle and limb and enables a man to place his little finger on the tip of his nose with his eyes closed.

Aside from the presence of foreign matter, the taste of a clean mouth is—tasteless. The term is relative. Jerry Markham learned what real tastelessness was. It was flat and blank and—nothingness.

Chemists tell us that air is tasteless, colorless, and odorless, but when sense is gone abruptly one realizes that the air does indeed have its aroma.

In an unemployed body the primitive censors of the mind had nothing to do, and like a man trained to busy-ness, loafing was their hardest task. Gone was every sensory stimulus. His heart pumped from habit, not controlled by the feedback of sound or feeling. He breathed, but he did not hear the inrush of air. Brain told him to be careful of his mouth, the sharp teeth could bite the dead tongue and he could bleed to death never feeling pain nor even the swift flow of salty warmth. Habit-trained nerves caused a false tickle in his throat; he never knew whether he coughed or whether he thought that he coughed.

The sense of time deserted him when the metronome of heartbeat died. Determined Brain compromised by assuming that crude time could be kept by the function of hunger, elimination, weariness. Logical Brain pointed out that he could starve to death and feel nothing; elimination was a sensory thing no more; weariness was of the body that brought no information any-

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way—and what, indeed was sleep?

Brain considered this question. Brain said, I am Jerry Markham. But is it true that no brain can think of nothing? Is it possible that "Sleep" is the condition that obtains when the body stops conveying reliable information to the brain, and then says to Hell with Everything and decides to stop thinking?

The Brain called Jerry Markham did not stop thinking. It lost its time sense, but not completely. A period of time passed, a whirlwind of thoughts and dreamlike actions went on, and then calmness came for a while.

Dreams? Now ponder the big question. Does the brain dream the dream as a sensory experience—or is a dream no more than a sequence of assorted memories? Would a dying brain expire in pleasure during a pleasant dream—or is the enjoyment of a pleasant dream only available to the after-awakened brain?

What is Man but his Memories?

In one very odd manner, the brain of Jerry Markham retained its intellectual orientation, and realized that its physical orientation was uncontrollable and undetectable and therefore of no importance. Like the lighthouse keeper who could not sleep when the diaphone did not wrneeee-hrnawwww for five seconds of each and every minute, Jerry Markham's brain was filled with a mild concern about the total lack of unimportant but habitual data. There was no speckle of light to classify and ignore, no susurrus of air molecules raining against the eardrum. Blankness replaced the smell and taste and their absence was as disturbing as a pungence or a poison. And, of course, one should feel something if it is no more than the tonus of muscle against the mobile bones.

Communication is the prime drive of life. Cut off from external communication entirely, section A, bay 6, tier 9, row 13 hollered over to box Q, line 23, aisle F and wanted to know what was going on. The gang on the upper deck hailed the boiler room, and the crew in the bleacher seats reported that the folks in charge of C.I.C.—Communication Information Center—were sitting on their hands because they didn't have anything to do. One collection of bored brain cells stirred. They hadn't been called upon since Jerry Markham sang *"Adeste Fidelis"* in memorized Latin some fifteen years earlier and so they started the claque. Like an auditorium full of people impatient because the curtain had not gone up on time, bedlam broke loose.

Bedlam is subject to the laws of periodicity, stachostic analysis, and with some rather brilliant manipulation it can be reduced to a Fourier Series. Fourier says that Maxwell is right and goes on to define exactly when, in a series of combined periodicities of apparently random motion, all the little particles will be moving in the same direction. Stachostic analysis says that if the letter

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"U" follows the letter "Q" in most cases, words beginning with "Q" will have "U" for a second letter.

Jerry Markham began to think. Isolated and alone, prisoner in the cell of bone, with absolutely nothing to distract him, the Brain by common consent pounded a gavel, held a conference, appointed a chairman and settled down to do the one job that the Brain was assembled to do. In unison, ten to the sixteenth storage cells turned butter side up at the single wave of a mental flag.

He thought of his father and his mother; of his Sally. He thought of his commanding officer and of the fellows he liked and disliked. The primitive urge to communicate was upon him, because he must first establish communication before he could rise from the stony mineral stage to the exalted level of a vegetable. Bereft of his normal senses, undistracted by trivia such as noise and pain and the inestimable vastness of information bits that must be considered and evaluated, his brain called upon his memory and provided the background details.

The measured tread of a company of marching soldiers can wreck a bridge.

The cadence of ten to the sixteenth brain cells, undivided by the distraction of incoming information, broke down a mental barrier.

As vividly as the living truth, Jerry Markham envisioned himself sauntering down the sidewalk. The breeze was on his face and the pavement was beneath his feet, the air was laden with its myriad of smells and the flavor of a cigarette was on his tongue. His eyes saw Sally running toward him, her cry of greeting was a welcome sound and the pressure of her hug was strong and physical as the taste of her lips.

Real.

She hugged his arm and said, "Your folks are waiting."

Jerry laughed. "Let the general wait a bit longer," he said. "I've got a lot to tell him."

Huvane said, "Gone!" and the sound of his voice re-echoed back and forth across the empty cell.

"Gone," repeated Chelan. "Utterly incomprehensible, but none the less a fact. But how—? Isolated, alone, imprisoned—cut off from all communication. All communication—?"

"I'll get another specimen, chief."

Chelan shook his head. "Seven times we've slapped them down. Seven times we've watched their rise—and wondered how they did it. Seven times they would have surpassed us if we hadn't blocked them. Let them rise, let them run the Universe. They're determined to do that anyway. And now I think it's time for us to stop annoying our betters. I'd hate to face them if they were angry."

"But chief, he was cut off from all communication—?"

"Obviously," said Chelan, "not!"

THE END

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THE MAN WHO DID NOT FIT

The real test of any organizational system is not in its ability to handle the expected and predictable—but in its ability to deal with the deviant, the odd-ball....

BY ALGIS BUDRYS

Illustrated by van Dongen

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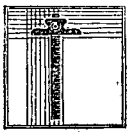

HE figure of Michael Wireman haunts the history of the Restoration like some ghost of an unknown tragedy. If not for him, Earth would not be free today. If not for him, the Invaders would hold the Solar System to this day. He, and he alone, is the man who shored the foundations of Earth's destiny when these had all but crumbled.

"Yet, who knows this man? Taciturn, irascible at the friendliest inquiry, he will be no more silent in his sepulcher than he is today in life. Keeping his own counsel as securely as he does whatever experiences have shaped him to such a nature, he has done great things without obvious hesitation or the advice of any other living soul. Whatever it was in his youth that tempered this unlovable man to greatness, the record is lost. Young Michael Wireman is lost, in the shifting darkness of unwitnessed perils and solitary agonies of which only the great statesman he became can speak. He will not, and so we cannot hope to understand this man. We can only say to him, humbly, that a free Earth will be his monument when he at last is laid within the soil he loves."

—Robert Markham, Lit. D.,
Michael Wireman's Century
(Michael Wireman's personal copy bears on its flyleaf the slashingly penciled notation: "Poppycock!")

The Invader patrol was at first nothing more than approaching motor noise behind a dip in the sunbaked asphalt road. Then a small armored gun-carrier jounced over the nearest rise and braked hurriedly at the sight of Michael Wireman standing with his arms in the air. It was near the middle of the day. It was hot, and Michael Wireman's dirty coveralls were sodden. He kept his arms up despite the throb of a bad headache, and looked expressionlessly into the muzzle of the carrier's machine gun.

An Invader officer, natty and forbidding in his silver-corded black uniform, looked out curiously. "Are you surrendering, boy?"

Michael Wireman nodded.

"Well, for Heaven's sakes get off the roadway. Are you trying to get yourself run down?" He gestured impatiently, and Michael Wireman, with a shrug, stepped backward to the shoulder. The officer nudged his driver, and the gun-carrier slid over to a stop beside him, its exhaust popping down to a murmurous idle.

A column of six armored trucks hurried by with a blast of wind. The officer spoke briefly into a radio microphone, and a duplicate gun-carrier which had been bringing up the rear of the column suddenly put on a burst of speed, passed the trucks, and took up the lead position. The patrol disappeared in the direction of the gutted Invader command post. Michael Wireman and the Invaders were left alone on the road, with the pine woods on either side of them and the flank of the nearest mountain rising up at the north.

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The officer swung out a lean leg and rested his boot on a fender. He lounged back in his seat, frowning at Michael Wireman, studying his face and his clothes, and finally said, still a little impatiently: "You can drop your hands, son. Now—what's all this about?"

Michael Wireman clasped his hands behind his back. "I'm surrendering."

"I know that. But, why?"

From the officer's point of view, it was an excellent question.

The Invader occupation of Earth had been in effect so long that not one Invader out of a hundred currently on Earth had even been old enough to serve in the war. In the twenty years since, relations between Invaders and Earthmen had stabilized to a routine. The Invaders, except for a greater tendency to be tall and lean, were physically indistinguishable from terrestrial humans. Human—and Invader—nature being what it was, and the Invaders being a demonstrably fair and even likable people, there was very little trouble between the two races.

Only around the mountains where a certain number of dissidents had fled was there any need for garrisons or patrols, and even there the number of clashes was negligible. The officer could not see a serious enemy in Michael Wireman. He knew there were unregistered people in the mountains. But he rightly did not think them worth the trouble of routing out. He, along with every other young officer on Earth, longed for transfer to the frontier, where there might be some excitement in the fitful incidents involving the rival Centaurian System Organization.

On the other hand, there had just been a clash in the mountain foothills. An Invader police station had been suddenly attacked and wiped out, the terrestrial dissidents retreating immediately afterward, under strafing by a patrol aircraft. The routine—little-used though it might be—called for an armored patrol to strike the site of the attack. This was being done. But there was no hope of following the dissidents up into the wooded mountains. Any true punitive expedition would have to be organized later, and from a different headquarters than the constabulary establishment which had mounted the immediate patrol. The dissidents were clearly safe for at least the time being, and to have one of them surrender now, after taking part in a successful raid, was totally inexplicable.

Belatedly, it occurred to the peacetime oriented officer that all this might be a trick. He looked about him at the woods in sudden wariness. Then it became obvious that any trap would have been sprung long ago. Exasperated at finding himself still alive through no credit to himself, he snapped: "Well?"

Michael Wireman could only know that one more authoritarian was barking at him. He could think of no short way to explain the complicated state of his mind. "I've had enough," he said in a monotone. "I'm quitting."

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"You've killed enough of us, and now you want to call time, is that it?"

Michael Wireman shook his head. "I haven't killed any of you." But he had shot two fellow Earthmen, not so long ago. The remembered shock of his automatic rifle dancing in his hands re-communicated itself to him sharply, and his arms twitched. "I've just had enough."

"Open your mouth," the officer said suddenly. "Let me see your teeth." He stared fiercely at Michael Wireman's incomprehension, and said: "Do it!"

Michael Wireman skinned his lips apart, feeling foolish. The officer reached out suddenly and felt the cloth of his coveralls. He seemed to learn something from all this, and belatedly Michael Wireman realized what it might be. The officer was studying him intently.

"You haven't been in those mountains very long. And that's no terrestrial coverall you're wearing. Where'd you come from?"

Now that it was too late, Michael Wireman still could not bring himself to speak. He simply shook his head, appalled at not having thought how much his surrender might involve. He should have stopped to think, he realized now. But it was too late. And, being too late, everything from now on was inevitable.

For the first time, Michael Wireman understood exactly what surrender does to a man. He let the breath out of his chest, not caring any more whether his shoulders slumped or no.

"I'm from Cheiron, Alpha Centaurus," he admitted. "I was dropped into the mountains by parachute, ten day ago."

"So you're a Centaurian spy."

"I'm a Free Terrestrial," Michael Wireman shot back.

"Oh ho," the Invader officer said, leaning back once again. "From the Free Terrestrial Government in Exile?"

Michael Wireman nodded.

"And you're surrendering." The officer toyed with the channel selector on his radio transmitter. "That's very interesting." He flipped a switch. "Give me Regional Headquarters," he said. "Lieutenant Boros here." He waited, tapping one knee with the fingers of his free hand, and looking steadily at Michael Wireman.

Something had to break that awkward silence. Michael Wireman blurted: "They hanged the officer in charge of the command post."

Lieutenant Boros' lips disappeared in a pinched, pale face.

"From the flagpole," Michael Wireman went on unrelentingly.

"Shut up!"

"I was trying to explain—" Michael Wireman's voice trailed away. He hadn't explained anything. He stared down at his boots.

"Headquarters? Lieutenant Boros, co-commanding relief patrol to Route 209 command post. I'm bringing in a prisoner." There was a pause. "No, sir. Lieutenant Laram would have notified me of any contact with the

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dissident main body. This was a stray. Voluntary surrender, and he's willing to talk. Yes, sir. I'll bring him in right away."

He hung up the microphone, reached around, and opened the rear door. He got out, unholstered his sidearm, and squeezed himself into the back seat. He pointed the sidearm coldly at the vacated place beside the impassive driver. Lieutenant Boros was a great deal less of a peacetime soldier now.

"Get in, traitor," he said.

Michael Wireman felt something crumple within himself.

The route to Regional Headquarters led past the command post, back the way Michael Wireman had come.

The white-painted concrete block of the command post stood as Michael Wireman had seen it last, with the ugly pocks of gunfire around its cannon slits and the whitewashed stone edgings kicked away from its gravel walk and flower beds, where Hammil's men had charged up to the walls. But two men from the relief patrol were rehanging the battered porcelain-enameled steel sign reading "Pennsylvania State Police." There was a short row of shrouded bodies laid out beside one wall. The Invader flag was back on its pole, in the center of the circular rock-garden which divided the front walk. The transport trucks were parked in orderly fashion in the small parking lot behind the post, next to the burned shell of the police patrol car.

Lieutenant Boros tapped the driver's shoulder. "Stop and blow your horn." The muzzle of his sidearm pressed slightly against the back of Michael Wireman's neck. As the gun-carrier slowed, inertia pressed it deeper into the flesh.

The gun-carrier stopped, and the driver tapped his horn button. The riot siren spun out a brief growl. The officer in charge of the patrol raised his head from where he was kneeling beside one of the bodies, stood up, and came walking over. Like Boros, and like the officer Franz Hammil had hanged, he might have been one of a family.

There had to be fat, short Invaders as well, Michael Wireman thought. But it was almost as if some factor in the Invader society had, for a long time now, been selecting for sunken cheeks, aquiline noses, short curly hair and a tall, loose-jointed wiriness that Earthmen associated with track-and-field athletes. With their dark faces and deep-set brown eyes, they all seemed to be communicants at one flame. It was their very unity that made so sharp a contrast with the Terrestrials they resembled. There was this sense of meshing about them—of equal interdependence, equal efficiency, perfect brotherhood.

Well, they had won the war—a hard war, with the issue in doubt for some time—and this quality of superhuman precision had likely been the vital difference.

The new officer saw Michael Wireman before he saw Lieutenant Boros in the rear compartment. He frowned, and studied Michael Wireman word-

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lessly, his hand sinking to his sidearm with a smooth, unhurried gesture. There was something genuinely deadly in the way he did it, and Michael Wireman was grateful when Lieutenant Boros said:

"It's all right, Kado," in the compact Invader language.

Kado Laram's face was subtly stiffened by recent shock. Although he had not seen Boros in the back seat up to now, he registered no surprise but merely swung his glance without moving his head. Very probably, he was temporarily incapable of thinking in long chains. In a flash of pure intuition, Michael Wireman suddenly could understand the Invader officer's numbness, and sympathize with it.

"Hello, Thon," Laram said quietly. "They got away. They killed everybody here. They seem to have shot the men who surrendered. And they—"

"Hanged Arl." Boros' sidearm muzzle poked sharply at Michael Wireman. "He told me."

"Are you taking him to the city?" Laram asked, studying Michael Wireman again.

"Yes."

"Don't lose him."

"I won't."

"Has he told you who was in charge of the dissidents?"

"Franz Hammil," Michael Wireman said.

"Speaks our language," Laram said with some interest but no surprise. He was more interested in the name he'd heard. "Franz Hammil."

"Do you know him?" Michael Wireman asked bitterly.

Laram looked through him, and nodded distantly. "Oh, yes, we know Franz Hammil."

There was no need for anyone to enlarge on the point, Michael Wireman thought.

Franz Hammil was a coarse, stubble-headed man who affected a gold-braided tunic, blue riding breeches, and polished cavalry boots even in the flyblown mountain camp that served as headquarters for his domain. His domain was part of one mountain and a smaller part of the next. His partisan army consisted of some two hundred lousy, ragged, starving men who, until recently, were armed with wornout Invader firearms filched one by one out of various places. Except for his ego, he was utterly indistinguishable from the dozens of other petty bandits who preyed on each other and the farmers on the mountain foothills. Vicious, depraved, constitutionally inferior, he would no more have ordinarily dared attack Invader troops than he would have refrained from cutting throats.

"Tell me, linguist," Laram said in a conversational tone, "did you have anything to do with hanging our friend?"

Michael Wireman shook his head. Two of Hammil's men had disarmed him for the look on his face when Hammil gave the order. But there was no point in telling this to the Invader officers.

"He's a peculiar one," Lieutenant Boros said. "He's from the old Terrestrial Government in Exile, on

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Cheiron. He was dropped to Hammil ten days ago, he says. They'll want to know, down at Headquarters, just what he was supposed to do."

Lieutenant Laram had apparently decided he'd learned enough from his study of Michael Wireman. "He'll tell them," he said. "Whatever it was, they sent a boy on a man's errand."

Michael Wireman thought of Franz Hammil, gross and flushed, standing to one side and looking up as his men hauled on the halyards and the terrible standard was raised to the top of the temporarily recaptured flagpole.

Franz Hammil had been a reserve lieutenant in the old Terrestrial Land Forces at the time of the surrender. That commission, forgotten and neglected for twenty years, had suddenly turned worth its weight in gold to the man who held it. There were plenty of bandits in the mountains. Franz Hammil was the only one who could claim military status. As of ten days ago, Franz Hammil was a full general, and supreme commander of Earth's resistance forces.

"I just want to surrender," Michael Wireman said doggedly. "That's all."

"You've been accommodated there, son," Lieutenant Boros said. He turned to Laram. "I'd better get this down to Headquarters. I'll see you back at the barracks."

Laram nodded. "All right." He turned and went back to supervise the careful loading of the bodies into one of the trucks.

Lieutenant Boros tapped the driver's shoulder. "Let's go," he said, and the driver engaged the clutch. The gun-carrier shot out on the highway again, and sped toward the city.

Once out of the foothills, the highway led through dairy country, passing small villages and towns. Everything looked neat and prosperous. There were well-fed, clean people out on the fields and on the town sidewalks. Everything seemed to have a recent coat of paint. There were a number of good-looking civilian vehicles on the road, and the store windows were full of consumer goods. Every so often, someone would wave a friendly hand to the hurrying gun-carrier, and at no time was there a sign of a frown or a half-hidden scowl. Michael Wireman received an overwhelming impression of a contented populace which regarded the gun-carrier as just another police car. From time to time, he saw Invader personnel, some in uniform but most of them not, walking the streets and talking to Earthmen just as if there was absolutely no distinction between them.

As they reached the city, the gun-carrier began passing near enough to people, and at a slow enough speed, so that Michael Wireman could be seen to be a prisoner at gunpoint. He was thunderstruck when a man leaned out of a bus window at a traffic light and deliberately spat downward, just missing his leg.

"Sit back, you," Boros growled as the gun-carrier pulled away from the light. "Think I want you torn to

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pieces by a mob before I can deliver you?"

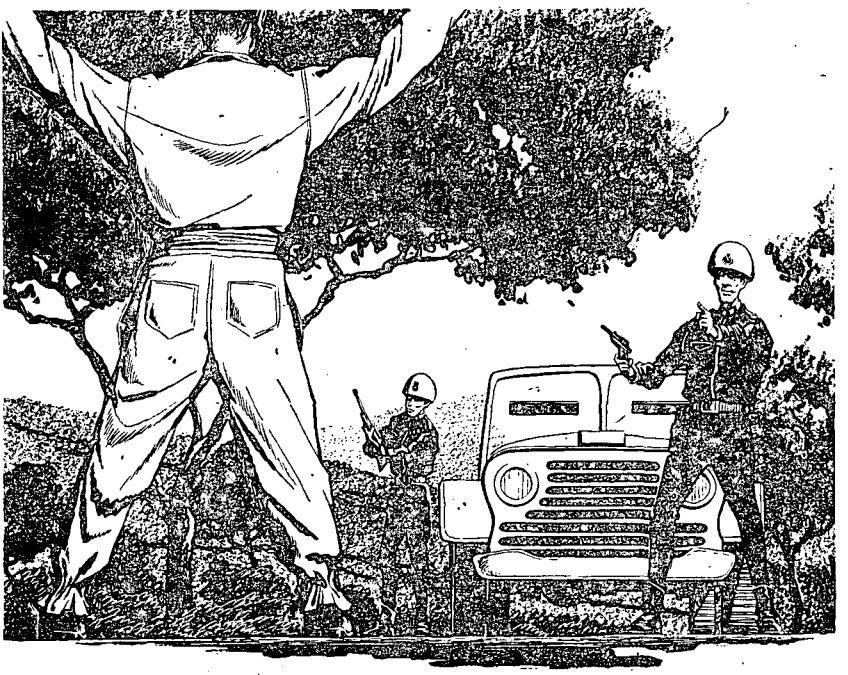
"Wh—?" Michael Wireman made an astonished noise.

"It may only have been ten days, but you had plenty enough time to get as dirty as any other dissident. I wouldn't blame them for making any mistakes."

Silently, Michael Wireman huddled inside the gun-carrier as they drove through the clean, proposerous, suddenly cold streets of Philadelphia.

The interrogating officer was a great deal older than Lieutenant Boros, who had gone back to his own garrison town with a grim face. But he, too, might have been an older brother in that hawk-faced family, and part of that one, great unit.

That quality in the interrogating officer confronted Michael Wireman now. His feeling of helplessness was only intensified by the speed with which a dossier on Michael Wireman had appeared in the interrogating officer's hands, brought by special messenger from Central Headquarters in Geneva, half a world away.



"Michael Wireman," the interrogating officer said softly, looking

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down at the opened folder. "Michael Wireman," he said again, as though especially intrigued. "Your father is president of the Government in Exile."

Michael Wireman nodded. The room was bare, without furnishing or decoration to catch the eye and offer it rest. There were two chairs, and a table between them. Michael Wireman, still in his perspiration soaked coveralls, dirty, not quite over an attack of fever from sleeping on cold and clammy ground, had no choice but to watch the interrogating officer.

"You were parachuted into the mountains ten days ago?"

"Yes."

"From a spaceship, obviously."

"Yes."

The interrogating officer looked up. "That ship would be a vessel of the Centurian System Organization armed forces?"

Michael Wireman fenced cautiously. "It doesn't belong to the C.S.O." He clung to the legal fiction. He understood how much trouble it might make for his father, even now, if he did not stress that tricky point.

The interrogating officer smiled ironically. "It must operate from a C.S.O. field on Cheiron; the pilot and crew, no matter what their exact status at this point, must be former members of the C.S.O. armed services—there simply aren't any of you old refugees qualified to fly an interstellar vessel. The ship has to be cared for at a C.S.O. naval dockyard."

"It's chartered by the Government in Exile."

The interrogating officer sighed. "And where does your Government in Exile get that kind of money?"

"The funds are converted assets which were on Cheiron before the capitulation of Earth."

"That's very interesting," the officer said. His lips pursed, and his eyes were close to twinkling. "The C.S.O. still recognizes our embassy on Cheiron. Our ambassador is forever wining and dining with high C.S.O. officials. But at the same time, C.S.O. courts find your government in exile legally entitled to funds which are the property of Earth, now an autonomous republic in that same nation our ambassador represents. Isn't it fascinating what can be done with international law?"

"I suppose it is," Michael Wireman said, and for some reason the interrogating officer abandoned his line of questioning in favor of another.

"Suppose we talk about you," he said. He shuffled through the papers. "You left Earth at the age of five, when your family fled to Cheiron, and have never been back. You grew up on Cheiron, among Centaurians who, descendants of Earthmen though they are, have been an independent people for generations; who have grown rich and powerful in their own right, and whose ties with Earth are tenuous in the extreme. Were you happy?"

"Happy enough."

"Were you, really?" The interrogating officer was suddenly less than casual. "I'd have thought you'd be preoccupied with your hope of an

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eventual return to Earth—with your status as a member of what would have to be regarded as Earth's most important family—with your difference from the children of a prosperous and self-assertive nation which has never known defeat. A nation which would regard Terrestrial affairs as very small beer indeed, and look upon a fervent Terrestrial patriot with a thick Centaurian accent as a rather strange kind of freak."

"You're very clever," Michael Wireman whispered.

"You're not a prepossessing boy," the interrogating officer went on. "You have funny-looking ears, and you're clumsy. You don't impress people as being particularly bright. Tell me again, Michael — were you happy?"

Michael Wireman shook his head.

"All right," the interrogating officer said gently. "When they decided to send you here, it was the answer to all your dreams, wasn't it? At last you were going back where you belonged."

There had been tears in Michael Wireman's eyes when he landed and felt Earth's soil between his fingers. "I was happy," Michael Wireman said.

"Happy," the interrogating officer said. He looked at Michael Wireman's face. "Yes, I imagine you were." He waited a little while, shuffling his papers, and said: "But now you're not. In ten days you've gone from happiness to misery. That's a sudden metamorphosis, Michael Wireman. Weren't you accepted into Hammil's group?" His glance came up. "Or wasn't Hammil exactly what you'd expected?"

Hammil had originally been contacted when the Government in Exile's cautiously scouting ship had sent a general message down to Earth. It had been the first attempt in twenty years to get in touch with loyal survivors on Earth, and it had been almost a surprise when someone answered.

It had been blind luck for Franz Hammil, with his stolen Invader radio. Blind luck, and the sharpness of wit to see that anything he said could be verified on Cheiron, but not verified in detail. Yes, he had an army. Yes, he was a commissioned officer in the old loyal armed forces. Yes, he was an outlaw on the Invaders' lists. These things were matters of public record, verifiable partly from the files brought out from Geneva when the last ship fled, and partly from copies of current Invader newspapers. And so, with the ship's next trip, Franz Hammil became a general, the official leader of loyal Earth.

Who could have guessed, on far-off Cheiron, what Franz Hammil was or what the resistance movement was? Great plans were about to move forward—titanic forces were about to lock.

Franz Hammil was sent a shipload of arms, and Michael Wireman to see to their delivery.

"You didn't like Hammil, or his methods," the interrogations officer

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said. "You didn't like the looks of liberty's champions, eh?"

"No."

"And they didn't like yours, I'd bet. You're lucky to be alive, you know that?"

"I know it. The last thing Hammil wanted was a representative of the legal government around to cramp his style. He had the idea he could suck us dry of guns and supplies, and take over all the mountain territories with them. Then he might try moving out to become dictator of the world. He's enough of a megalomaniac to have that idea."

The officer nodded slowly. "It might not be such a mad notion, at that," he murmured. "But we'll return to it. It's still you we're interested in."

Michael Wireman began to understand, again belatedly, that an Invader never asked a question without moving toward some objective beyond the obvious. He began to feel afraid of what the officer's ultimate point might be.

The interrogating officer was shaking his head. "You don't fit, Michael Wireman. You don't fit on Cheiron; you don't fit up in the mountains. I wonder . . . your father must be a very busy man—"

Michael Wireman bit his lip.

"You don't fit with your family. You don't fit anywhere, do you, Michael?"

Michael Wireman had nothing to say.

"Still— Would you be giving up so easily?" The interrogating officer seemed to enjoy his work. "Let's see how the pieces add themselves together—

"A ship, now. A whole interstellar ship, at the Government in Exile's disposal. That seems odd. And the president's son sent back to Earth on it. Well, now. Suppose we look at the big picture."

The interrogations officer leaned forward casually. Like a man reading lecture notes, he said:

Twenty years ago, the C.S.O. stayed out of the war. Earth was the old home world, but interstellar war's an expensive business if there's no territory to assimilate at the end of it, and they'd hardly have been prepared to make war on our home worlds as well. But governments like to cover all the possible angles, and so they let the Government in Exile establish itself in Cheiron City. They doled out little dribs of money to keep it going, and so kept a cheap string on Earth. For twenty years.

"Now things are different. Now our two spheres of interest are beginning to come into conflict in all sorts of places. They've grown more powerful, and their next natural area for expansion is one we want, too. Now might be a good time for a war. So the Government in Exile—the Government in Exile, mind you, not the C.S.O.—the Government in Exile suddenly becomes rich. Rich enough to sneak a ship into the Solar System.

"Now, why would they want to do that? Well, Earth's a quiet little place, these days—well back of our frontier,

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well out of our boom areas. The war's over for us. We don't have this place heavily garrisoned. So, if somebody down here could be found to engage our land forces and do the dying, while a C.S.O. fleet moved in to set up a nice, clean, comparatively cheap blockade to keep off our relief ships until it was too late—why, then the C.S.O. would have a very nice breach opening up in our defenses, at practically no cost.

"And if we somehow found out all these plans in mid-stream, why, it wouldn't be the C.S.O. that was caught with its finger in a very embarrassing pie. It would be that old Government in Exile, and the C.S.O. might even close it down for us, then. Why not? It would officially satisfy our protest, and all it would mean would be the sacrifice of an already shot bolt. What do you think of that, Michael?"

Michael Wireman had nothing to say. He watched the officer carefully.

"Doesn't it upset you to think of your family stripped of its status, Michael? Possibly interned, or at best left alone to get along on what your father and mother could earn as private citizens? How old is your father now, Michael? I understand your mother's an invalid."

"Go on."

"On? Well, yes, there is more, isn't there? Because you're not worried about what *might* happen. I thought perhaps you would be, but I see you're not. All right, let's go on. Let's go back to the Government in Exile's new money, and what it does with it.

"Let's say . . . oh, let's say the Government in Exile finds some surplus obsolescent C.S.O. weapons for sale. Let's say they're dropped to Hammil. Let's say a misfit boy with a valuable last name gets run through some C.S.O. military training courses, dressed in dyed C.S.O. Navy coveralls, and dropped with the guns so Hammil will have a qualified instructor for his weapons? Is that why you're still alive, boy? Am I right, boy?"

Michael Wireman was looking straight ahead.

"Boy," the interrogating officer said quietly, "didn't anyone realize? Not even your father? Once Hammil had the guns and the C.S.O. had a direct tie to him, they didn't need the Government in Exile any more. They're going to deal directly with him from now on. Your whole group has been cut right out of the picture. Hammil doesn't need your commission any longer. The C.S.O. doesn't need you to be its dummy any longer. They're committed now, and they might as well go at things directly. The C.S.O. has plans for Earth after the war, and they don't include restoring a rival sovereign power here. *Nobody* wants you."

The interrogations officer added softly: "You found that out, didn't you?"

Michael Wireman nodded. "The direct agreement between the C.S.O. and Hammil came in with the guns. I brought it with me and never even knew it until this morning."

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The Interrogations officer shook his head. "You've really had it, haven't you?"

Michael Wireman nodded distantly. "We went down the mountain to attack the command post this morning."

"Yes?"

"We went down the mountain. I couldn't believe it. I was positive Hammil would wipe out the rival bandit leaders first, and recruit the survivors. But we went down the mountain. I think Hammil wanted me to get killed. I didn't. We knocked over the command post, and then I found out why we'd attacked it in the first place. Hammil knew the commanding officer. He'd scored Hammil's classification test."

"Oh?" The interrogations officer looked sharply up at Michael Wireman. "You know about those, do you?"

The core of Invader society, and the core of Invader occupation policy, was the classification test. Developed and improved over centuries, it measured aptitudes and mental attitudes to perfection, determining each man's best place in his world, without for a moment restricting his ability to rise as far as he could. It worked. It made no errors. It ensured that each member of society fitted exactly into that society, doing that work which would make him happiest. The happier and the more satisfied he was, the more efficient he would be. There were no misfits in the Invader society. There were soon no misfits in any society the Invaders took over and re-structured.

The inevitable result, on Earth as everywhere else, was a perfectly co-ordinated society, each member happy with himself, his work and his fellows —and, tangentially, too well-off to plot revolution.

It worked. There were no hidden jokers. Ten thousand years of Invader civilization stood as a monument to its success.

There were dissidents in the mountains, true. They were the cast-off dregs of humanity, too compulsively nonco-operative too constitutionally ineffectual, to make their way within any ordered framework. They represented so small a percentage of the population, and were so hopelessly divided among themselves, that by themselves they barely presented an interesting problem for the other individuals whose greatest bent was for police work. No one pretended the classification test could build a society in which the congenital criminal could take a useful place. A dog breeder perforce also raises fleas.

"What about Hammil's test?" the interrogations officer prodded.

"He took the test, hoping for a commission in your army."

The officer smiled and nodded. "Oh, yes. Years ago." He looked at Michael Wireman sharply once more. "You realize what you're saying about him. He wouldn't even have been available to you people, if he'd won his chance to work for us. So much for your patriot."

"I know that. I know him." Michael Wireman's mouth curled.

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"He didn't get it. He's unfit for command. He's unfit to live with civilized human beings. But he blamed your officer, and he brooded over it for years. With that ego, how do you think he felt? He had to kill that officer. But he couldn't manage it by himself. When I brought him those C.S.O. guns, the first thing he used them for was to capture and hang that officer."

Michael Wireman's eyes clouded. The Invader officer had been the first person he'd seen on Earth that he could respect. He'd died like a man.

"And then?" the interrogations officer asked.

Michael Wireman shrugged. "Afterwards, Hammil had me witness a signature on a folded piece of paper. He seemed to think that would make some kind of good joke. I didn't care what it was. I was too sick. I signed it. Ralph Wireman's son. It turned out to be his copy of the direct agreement with the C.S.O. Then the plane came down and began strafing us. Everybody scattered. I saw my chance and slipped away down the road. That's all."

"That's all?" the interrogations officer repeated. "You knew about the classification test system before this morning?"

"No. What's that got to do with it?"

"Michael Wireman, you must have realized at some point today how much you're giving us with your surrender. You're not politically illiterate. We knew the C.S.O. would move against us somewhere, in some way. But now we know where, and how. It's probable now that our grip on Earth will never be shaken by anyone. Whatever happens, Earth will never be the Earth you'd love. You've surrendered your childhood dreams to us, Michael Wireman. And why? Because Hammil is an egomaniacal murderer? Because if we lose Earth, we won't lose it to your clique? You've given up your most precious ideal because of petty things like that?"

"Yes!"

"No! Don't you realize, Michael Wireman, what one thing will make a man give up his birthright?"

Michael Wireman had no answer.

"You want to fit in," the interrogations officer said. "You want to be accepted. I think we can say that unrealized ideals come second to that with any man. You want us to classify you. That's why you surrendered."

Michael Wireman couldn't deny it.

"Don't worry, Michael," the interrogations officer said gently and sincerely. "We'll make a good citizen out of you."

Michael Wireman stood at the window of his room in the morning, his hands on the sill, looking down at the city. The streets flowed with life, but there was no uproar. Traffic moved smoothly, at an even pace. The sidewalks carried a gaily-dressed load of pedestrians going about their business. There was nothing like Cheiron's bustling hubbub. He looked down at it, still weary despite a night's sleep, a hot bath, and clean clothes. The weariness would stay with him, deep

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in his bones, he knew, until he could become a part of that crowd, a man with a kith and a home.

He had given up making comparisons with the almost mythical Earth of his childhood. A five-year-old's memories were no accurate guide. The tales his mother had told him, too, were rendered useless by the wet-eyed nostalgia that overlaid them like a sticky frosting. He had only this, down there now, to aspire to. It was all he wanted.

There was a knock on the door behind him. "Come in," he said without turning, keeping his glance on the city until the last possible moment. Then he left the window at last, and said: "Yes?"

The middle-aged, ruddy man was an Earthman, and he carried a thick folder in one hand. He was dressed in clothes which seemed quite oddly tailored, after-Centurian fashions, but which were obviously expensive and conservative.

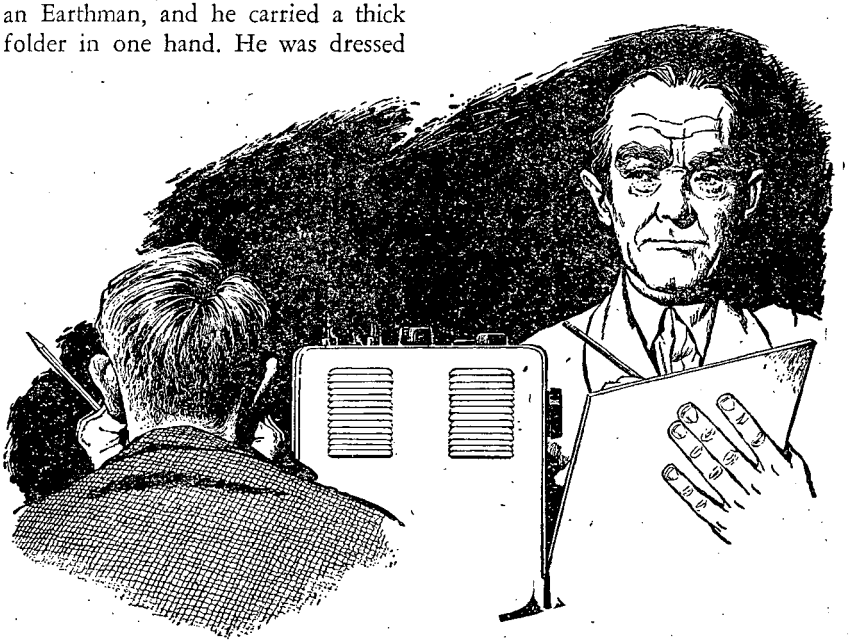
"My name is Hobart, Mr. Wireman," the man said, extending his hand.

"Dr. Hobart?" Michael Wireman asked, taking the hand and shaking it firmly.

"That's right," Hobart admitted quickly, "but don't let it worry you—I'm not going to strap you to any operating table and lobotomize you."

"I didn't expect you would," Michael Wireman said dryly.

Hobart's bushy eyebrows rose. "Oh. Forgive me." He smiled with a quick deprecatory skill. "Sometimes it's



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hard to judge how much one of you will know about the nature of the classification test."

Michael Wireman gestured toward a chair. "Sit down, doctor." He waited until Hobart was comfortable, smiling thinly to himself at the thought of how much his personal kind of weariness could do for a man's outward maturity, and said: "One of us dissidents? I'm a special case, doctor. Do you get a lot of captured men to classify?"

Hobart shook his head. "No, no, I can't say that we do. Usually, as you know—"

"I don't know, doctor."

"Very well, as you don't know, the dissidents want nothing so much as to be left alone. They can't cope with society or civilized mores. They hardly impinge on society at all, and so they're generally left alone. Too, I understand it would be quite difficult to comb them out of the mountains — if anyone really wanted to."

"But when you do get one of them, he's full of superstitious fears about brain-washing, is that it?"

"Well, yes."

"And you came in here expecting to find another low-normal like that."

"Well, yes."

"You don't like the dissidents, do you, doctor? They make trouble. They occasionally kill someone besides one of themselves, don't they?"

Hobart looked at him uncomfortably. "I have to admit that, yes."

"In fact, some Earthmen actively hate dissidents. Especially after something like what happened at the police station yesterday is broadcast over the news channels."

"Yes."

Michael Wireman looked thoughtfully at Dr. Hobart. He wondered if it would help to tell the man about the way he'd first learned what life in the mountains was like. It had happened while he and Newsted, Hammil's second-in-command, had been moving part of the arms shipment from the original drop rendezvous to Hammil's camp.

The rendezvous had been attacked, at dawn, and he and Newsted had barely gotten away. Tense, separated from everyone but Newsted, he had been making his way through the still forest that afternoon, when Newsted was suddenly shot without warning. Leaving the wounded man, he had circled away, come up behind the ambush, and sprayed it with his automatic rifle. Two men had died under his gun before he could release the trigger. Two Earthmen, from the gang that had tried to get at the guns that morning.

He felt fairly sure that it would raise his stock with Hobart to tell him he'd killed a pair of dissidents. But the memory of his nausea was too fresh in his mind. And it wasn't necessary, after all, that everyone like him.

It came as slight shock, to realize that Hobart's opinion of him did not matter.

"Were you going to say something

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more, Mr. Wireman?" Hobart asked curiously.

"No."

"I could have sworn—" Hobart said. "Well, no matter—" He settled more comfortably in his chair. "Tell me something about yourself, Mr. Wireman. What's your principal hobby?" Hobart's mild blue eyes were unexpectedly sapient, Michael Wireman realized.

"Hobbies?"

"What do you do best, Mr. Wireman?"

"Nothing." It was an honest answer.

"Nothing at all, Mr. Wireman?"

"That's right."

Hobart's eyebrows danced. "Well, then, I think we'd better get on with your test." He opened his folder. There were sheaves of paper inside. "Suppose you start on some of these forms, while I get the computer set up." He handed Michael Wireman some of the printed sheets, together with a pencil. "Just sit down anywhere, fill in the biographical information, then go on to the test. On this first part, just mark the direction in which you think the ultimate gear in each train will turn. It's quite simple—just mechanical comprehension."

"Simple. Yes." Michael Wireman looked down at the sheets. "It's what the computer makes of it all in relation to my other skills that counts, though."

"That's right, Mr. Wireman." Hobart had opened the hall door and brought in a cubical metal box on casters. "Don't worry, we'll have you finished in a few hours."

Michael Wireman's mouth had gone dry. Hobart was just a fussy man with some papers and a machine. But the next few hours were important—they were vitally important—and this man, these papers, that machine, together, were what he had been seeking all his life.

From time to time, the computer gave Hobart unseen sub-computations which, in some way Michael Wireman was not equipped to understand, guided the man in administering the next battery of tests. Hobart had a mannerism—a way of looking aside at the dials without so much as blinking—which Michael Wireman found upset him badly. At one point there was a rip from the latest test form, and Michael Wireman found his pencil had torn through it. He realized then that he was growing dangerously irritated, and tried to calm himself. He became unpleasantly aware of perspiration beading his upper lip and seeping down the walls of his chest.

From time to time, Hobart called a rest period, and they chatted about inconsequentials Michael Wireman began to doubt were inconsequential.

Hobart's carefully unblinking eyes twitched toward the dials and back. "Mr. Wireman."

"Yes?"

"Suppose we relax for a while." Was his voice too gentle? Were his eyes too knowing?

"I'd like to go on."

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"Suppose we relax."

"All right." There wasn't anything else to do, if Hobart wanted to stop.

"Good." The man registered satisfaction. "I'm curious about your life with the dissidents. It's not often we get an *objective* opinion."

The stress was definitely there. Was Hobart sneering at him?

"What about it?" Michael Wireman answered sharply.

Hobart sighed patiently. "Do you have the idea I dislike you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I'm a dissident."

"But you're not, are you?"

"No! But you won't be easy with me until I'm classified."

"Oh?"

"You can't like me, doctor. I don't fit, yet. I might turn out to be anything."

Hobart considered the answer seriously. "You may be right. I can't pretend I'm comfortable in your presence. I can't help thinking you were with Franz Hammil on that raid."

"Hammil," Michael Wireman said angrily, "is a slug. But he's nothing to worry about. If Joe Newsted had the ability to make people follow him, then you'd have something up in those mountains to make your blood really run cold."

"Oh?"

"Hammil needs Newsted to get him out of trouble, because Hammil alone would kill himself in no time. Hammil doesn't quite realize that, but he's got animal cunning enough to keep Newsted around."

"And Newsted?"

"Nobody likes Newsted. Nobody likes Hammil, either, but he hypnotizes you. You have to think that a man who puts on so many airs has to have something, underneath it all. Newsted couldn't get an idiot boy to follow him. So he has to sponge on Hammil to stay alive at all. The crippled lead the crippled, up in the mountains, but they don't do it for love of each other."

Hobart's cold eyes glanced to the dials and back.

"Is there a voice-recording input on that thing?" Michael Wireman asked sharply.

"Never mind that."

"Never mind it?"

"Mr. Wireman, are you here to take the test or aren't you?"

"You *don't* like me, do you?"

"No." Hobart seemed relieved. "I've decided. I think I hate you, a little bit, Mr. Wireman. You don't like the things I like. You don't think in a way I can understand. Most important, I can never say to myself: 'Anything this man can do, I can do.'"

"So we understand each other."

"No, Mr. Wireman. We've perhaps come to an agreement, but we don't understand each other. Tell me about Newsted, now. You admire Newsted to a certain extent, don't you?"

"I don't."

"You admire his intelligence. Tell

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me something. What could Newsted do to overthrow Hammil?"

"Do? He could get control of Hammil's weapons. Then he could have Hammil killed. But he wouldn't last more than a day or two before someone killed him. He's not the type to lead. He doesn't have Hammil's gall. Hammil can give a suicidal order as though it were the wisdom of the ages. Newsted can't say something perfectly sensible without sounding as if he didn't trust himself."

"Let's say he could. Let's say Newsted could command followers. Then what? How would he get control of Hammil's guns, precisely?"

"He'd desert Hammil, and take a few picked men with him. He'd contact other bandits in the mountains, and recruit his own army with a promise of weapons. He'd lay out an intelligent plan of attack, surprise Hammil, and that would be that. Hammil couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag, surprised by men who know mountain tactics."

"And then, what? What would he do from there?"

"He'd consolidate the mountains. He'd get more guns. He'd get some light automatic cannon, and wipe out your foothill garrisons. That would give him motorized equipment. Then, with the proper support in the air, he could do almost anything, if your troops here weren't reinforced. Particularly if he promised his men they could loot the cities."

"Is that so?"

Wireman laughed savagely. "But he couldn't do it. Even if he could lead men, the people who supply the guns and the air support won't deal with him. He's a criminal, with a record. They don't dare invest in him. They've got to have somebody they believe would fight a war, instead of raiding and retreating with the loot. They need somebody like Hammil, who wants to be Julius Caesar. And with Newsted giving him a little help here and there, that's what he could be. If he plays his cards right. But he won't. He'll stumble, somewhere—he was born to stumble."

"That's a very interesting analysis, Mr. Wireman. Do you really think the garrison army can be overcome so easily?"

"Look, a garrison army exists to hold strong points until a reinforcing army can take the field. You people down here have gone soft with your peacetime living. You figure the dissidents'll kill themselves off, and die of disease, or give up through simple ineffectuality. And meanwhile the garrisons hold them in check. That's well and good, as long as the reinforcements can come through. And until the dissidents start getting modern weapons from the outside, and one man—just one man to lead them—who knows what to do with them."

"This is all theoretical, of course."

Wireman blinked. He realized he was up on his feet, and had no idea how long he'd been standing. He felt extremely foolish. "Of course," he said.

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"I'm fascinated by you, Mr. Wireman, did you know?"

"What?" He barked it because he thought Hobart was sneering again.

"I wonder, now," Hobart said softly. "The Invaders don't seem to have any record of such a thing in their own society. Perhaps it was a long time ago, and they've selected the strain out. And it's a rare one in any case, if it exists at all. I'm not sure about you, Mr. Wireman. But now that I think about it, perhaps its reasonable. A man who can't fit society will sink down and become a parasite on its edges, most of the time. But a test can't measure a factor that invalidates its basis. A society can't find a place for a man who could rebuild it."

"What about the test, Hobart?"

"You flunked it, Mr. Wireman. You haven't come anywhere near being classified for anything. It was obvious from the start. You tried to overawe me just because I was going to give it to you. You tried to evade the machine. You've been fighting it every step of the way, until you've worked yourself into a rage. I've got to tell you, Mr. Wireman, that as far as my figures are concerned, you're no more a fit human being than Franz Hammil."

I've come to the end, Michael Wireman thought. I've come to the very end, and nobody is my friend, no place is my home. I have nothing left except— Except myself!

He was twisting the front of Hobart's shirt. "Get me out of here!" he was whispering hoarsely with a red haze across his vision. "Get me downstairs and into a car. I've had it, now, Hobart. I'm going to start taking things apart, and when I'm through, you won't recognize them. I'll start with you, if you don't show me how to get out of this town."

Hobart was pushing ineffectually at his hands. "Guards," he said hoarsely.

"How many?"

"I don't know."

"Waiting for me?"

"No. Just guards. A squad. Routine. This is Regional Headquarters Medical Annex."

"I'll get by them. Where's your car?"

"Garage. Downstairs."

Holding the doctor with one hand, Wireman went through his pockets and found the keys. "Thanks."

"You can't make it. *Armed* guards."

"Used to doing sentry-go in a building full of civilians. Want to study the effects of unarmed combat techniques, doctor? You look up those guards after a while."

"You'll never reach the garage. You won't get out if you do."

"Bet? Bet, doctor? I can do anything. Anything, if I need to. Not just one thing. Anything."

"You're euphoric, Wireman. You are on a jag."

"It feels good, doctor. It feels like I'm home at last."

He twisted more of the doctor's shirt. "I'm going to have to put you

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under for a while." He reached for the side of the doctor's neck. "Carotid pressure. You'll be all right after a while."

Hobart's eyes were bright and staring. "Smash the computer," he whispered, as he felt the flow of oxygen into his brain diminishing. "Got tape—your plans—luck . . . fascinating . . ."

"Good-by, doctor," Michael Wireman said. "Thank you."

"That wasn't the end of the story, of course. But there's old Popeyes Markham's 'solitary agony,' and be damned to him. I never cared what anybody said about me. I did what I wanted to do, every day of my life from that day on, and I intend to go on that way for the few days left to me. I fixed it so the C.S.O. had no choice but to back me, once I held the mountains, and I played the C.S.O. off against the Invaders so neither of them could send a fleet to take Earth away from me. I built trading alliances while they fought it out, and I was stronger than either of 'em at the end of the war. I did it for reasons that will be obvious from the foregoing. I did it to satisfy my ego and my wounded pride, and for the sake of the truly sweet taste of revenge. It's just luck for Earth that what was best for my ambition was best for her. I'm an old man now, and I've had years to think it over. Hobart was right. There's no difference between me and Franz Hammil, except I've got more ego than he did, and I had the guts to really take things apart, instead of messing around the edges. I said it, I say it, I will say it on the day I die: What I do, I do for myself. The world I was born in was meant for others. Tough on them.

—Michael Wireman"

(Robert Markham, Lit. D., apparently tickled Michael Wireman's vanity. The above quote and other quasi-reportorial data are from Wireman's highly private diary, delivered sealed to Dr. Markham upon the reading of Wireman's testament. In the margin beside the final paragraph, Dr. Markham has penned, in his characteristic Spencerian, the word: "Poppycock?")

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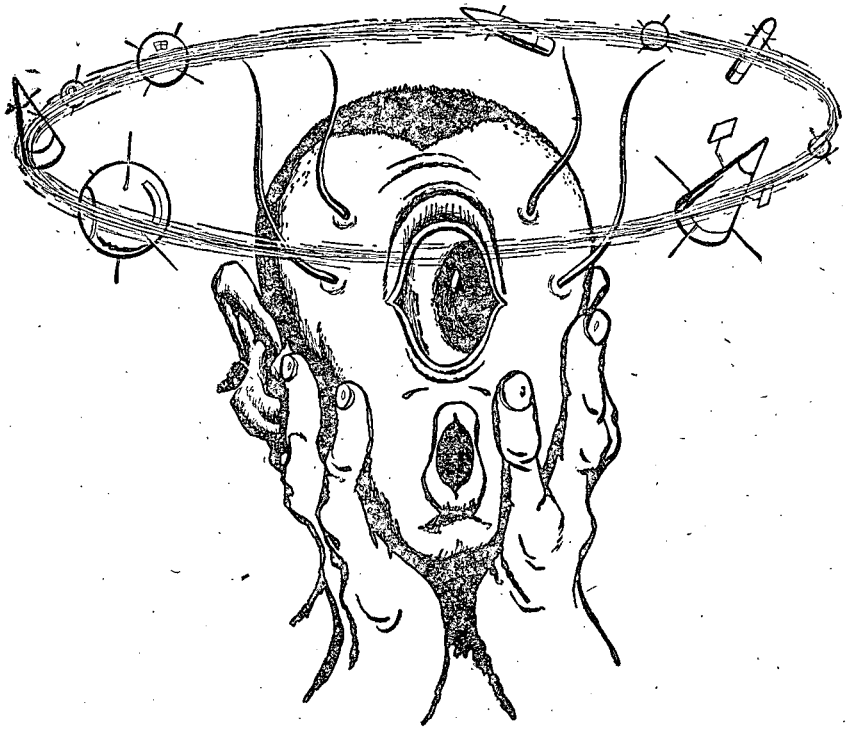

TRANSLATION ERROR

BY ROBERT SILVERBERG

Predicting the future must be a matter of probabilities—but while no probability can reach 1.000, there are some that, no matter how you twist things, are . . . fated, perhaps, to come out. . . .

Illustrated by van Dongen

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SEVERAL strange objects were glittering in the amber depths of his detector plate, and Karn felt a gnawing uneasiness. It was only a few minutes after the ship's conversion out of the null-continuum onto the world-line of Earth, after the long nullspace voyage from Karn's distant home world.

Absent-mindedly Karn let his body cells flow into the Earther shape he had worn on his last visit, almost fifty years earlier, while he brooded over the rapidly moving objects in the detector plate. They seemed to be small bodies locked in orbit round the blue-green world below. They made no sense at all. The obvious explanation was that they were artificial planetary satellites, but surely that was impossible! Nine tiny metal moons, each in its own elliptical orbit—implications of that made Karn feel sick. Earth could *not* have reached this stage along the technological scale yet, he told himself flatly. His computations could not have erred.

Or could they have?

Karn felt a chill invading his limbs. He went about the routine business of setting up his one-man ship for a landing, and tried to forget the annoying existence of those nine artificial satellites. Rapidly he converted to planetary drive, switching off the nullspace translator that had brought him along the megaparsec-wide gulf between his home world and Earth, and headed into the descending series of spiraling orbits that would land him.

Artificial satellites, he thought dismally. *How could such a thing be?*

Karn checked the flow of despair that threatened to overwhelm him. What had been done could be undone again; if Earth somehow had reached the threshold of space despite all his careful work in 1916, he would simply have to take steps to correct that trend. He wondered who it was that had put the satellites up. The Germans, obviously. Scientifically and politically, they would be dominating the Earth in the year—what was it?—1959.

Yes, it had to be the Germans. America had the technologically-inclined minds, but America, slumbering behind its hundred eighty years of isolation, would hardly have any interest in conquering space. The Americans hardly knew there were other nations on their own world, let alone whole other worlds.

And no other nations seemed likely candidates for ownership of the accursed satellites. Certainly not France or Britain, crushed under the Kaiser's heel in 1916. Nor old medieval Russia, comfortably vegetating beneath the Czar. Italy? Austro-Hungary?

Possibly Japan, he thought. The Japanese might have put the things up.

But, Karn realized drearily, neither Germany nor Japan had as much as developed efficient airpower in 1916; it was incredible that in a bare forty-odd years they could have hurled orbiting satellites into space. Such a

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technological advance could have been stimulated only by war.

And, thought Karn, unless his computations were wrong for the first time in centuries, there had been no war on Earth since 1916, since the Treaty of Dusseldorf. He had carefully arranged things the last time. By keeping America out of the war, he had ensured German triumph, German dominion over all Western Europe. His computations had predicted at least seventy years of peace before the broken revolutionary movement in Russia at last recovered its strength, hurled the Czar from his throne, and challenged Germany's dominance. On his last visit he had removed the stimuli of immediate war. Yet space satellites circled the Earth.

Something had gone wrong, Karn thought bleakly. But given time he could put things to rights again.

His ship sliced down into the upper layers of the atmosphere. To his surprise, he discovered that the radioactivity of Earth's atmosphere had increased remarkably in the last forty years. Did that mean that the Earthers had unleashed nuclear energy *too?*

Something was very wrong. Karn feared he had plenty of work on his hands.

His original plans had called for him to make a landing in America, and for the moment he did not intend to alter those plans. He made the landing under cover of scramblers; forty years ago such pains had been unnecessary, but who knew now what sort of technology these Earthers had developed? For all he knew they had developed a detector system, too. It would be ignominious for him to be blasted out of the sky as a possible attacker. And until he had found out what the state of things was on Earth, it was madness to take risks. He landed under scramblers, totally impervious to detection. A neutrino-detector might have spotted him successfully —but, thought Karn, if they had invented neutrino-detectors, too, he might just as well turn around and go back to Hethivar with the doleful news that Terran invaders would be on their way sooner than anyone had dreamed. The neutrino screen came *much* later in a planet's development. Normal races didn't go from animal-drawn buggies to neutrino screens in fifty years, Karn thought.

Normal races didn't go from buggies to atomics and orbital satellites in fifty years either, Karn reflected. But who said these Earthers were normal?

He landed the ship in a pleasantly green meadow in the state across the river from New York. He could remember New York, all right, but the other state's name eluded him for the moment. New Guernsey? New Calais? Ah! *New Jersey.* That was it. He left the ship parked in New Jersey, having first keyed in the external scrambler that rotated the ship one-quarter turn out of the world line. It wavered and vanished. No one would find it where it was now, though Karn could restore it to the con-

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tinuum with a minimal outlay of energy, whenever he pleased.

His first step was to transport himself autokinetically across the river into New York City. The city had grown somewhat since 1916, but he had expected that. His extrapolation had foretold a building boom trending toward giantism. It was relieving to find one aspect of Earth following expectation.

The Hethivarian hovered invisibly over a Manhattan street long enough to pick out a likely entity for duplication. He would need a working identity while he was here.

He chose a man almost at random from a group of identically-clad humans in gray suits, and entered his mind long enough to duplicate the information he needed. Withdrawing, Karn made the necessary transformation and allowed himself to materialize.

Now he wore contemporary American clothes and the contemporary close-cropped hair style. In the trouser pocket of his flannel suit was a wallet duplicating in every respect that of the unsuspecting individual walking ahead. Karn had an ample supply of currency now—the paper money was smaller in size than it had been, Karn noted—as well as the necessary documents for survival and a ready-made familiarity with current events and contemporary slang.

He had no desire to encroach on the identity of the man he had momentarily entered, and so as he walked along he made minor alterations in the body he wore, thickening the ears, adding a mustache, deepening the facial lines. He increased the body weight by about a fifth. No one would mistake him for the other now.

All right, he thought. He could bluff the rest of the way. *Now to catch up on news events since 1916, and see just how I could have been so wrong.*

Karn already had a picture of the way Earth *should* have looked. He had spent several years on the planet already, rushing there in 1914 at the outbreak of war and rapidly healing the breaches until peace became possible two years later.

From his own extrapolations and from the computed results, he had expected the German Empire to be the world's dominant state, fat with its network of global colonies, replete with conquest and sanely satiated. German had all the territory it wanted or needed; it would embark on no campaign of world conquest. The status would remain quo. America, having been kept out of the Great War by Karn's careful intervention, would have clasped the Monroe Doctrine to itself even more firmly and would have shut itself away from the troublesome world out across the oceans. Russia would be drowsing under the yoke of the Czar. Peace would pervade the Earth.

A pleasant peace, an era of good feelings.

Karn's motive was simple. The first scouts visiting Earth, more than a century before, had reported a vigorous and appallingly inventive race, just entering its mechanical age. The

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computed extrapolations had given the Hethivarian Network its biggest jolt in a millennium. They showed that Earth would be twice convulsed by war in the next century, each time taking a giant stride up the technological ladder. Without external meddling, the Earthers would leap right into the space age with frightening speed. Probabilities showed a .32 chance that the quarrelsome Earthers would destroy themselves in a hundred years—and a .68 chance that they would not, but instead would channel their dynamic forces and leap outward.

Extrapolations showed that in a mere five centuries the Earthers would be, unless they managed to destroy themselves meanwhile, colonizing the stars—challenging the might of the age-old Hethivarian Network itself!

It was a frightening thought indeed. In five centuries the Earthers would accomplish what it had taken Hethivar untold millennia to do. They had to be stopped, for the sake of the galactic balance.

A little study showed that there were two ways to stop the Earthers—and since one, the immediate obliteration of Earth by ultrabomb, was utterly repugnant to the highly civilized Hethivarians, there actually was only one way open. Internal intervention was called for. A trained Hethivarian agent would have to go to Earth and ease the pressures, turn down the flame under the kettle, pull back on the reins.

All that needed to be done was to remove the stimulus of war, which led to technological upspurts. A placid and untroubled Earth might sink into an amiably slothful way of life; the fierce spark that burned there might die down. So Karn was sent, and Karn engineered a peace. Not a lasting peace, of course—Earth would not be ready for that for a long time—but a stopgap, good for sixty or seventy years. When the next crisis arrived, it could be dealt with the same way. And the next, and the next, and the next—and so on into the distant future, if necessary. It was a sound plan. It would keep the Earthers from barking at the gates of the Network for centuries. It would maintain the calm balance of peace that had existed in the universe for so many thousands of years.

But, thought Karn, something had slipped up.

What?

He would have to find a library and check up on recent history. But first, he decided to purchase a newspaper. Entering his borrowed memory, he learned that newspapers could be bought with small silver coins. They were sold along the streets.

Karn pulled change from his pocket, selected a dime, and bought a *Times*. He scanned the front page rapidly.

Cold terror rippled through him.

Monstrous! he thought in baffled shock.

The headlines screamed incomprehensible things at him.

PRESIDENT CALLS FOR INCREASE IN FOREIGN AID

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RUSSIA TURNS DOWN NEW PARLEY OFFER

SATELLITE LAUNCHING POSTPONED ONE WEEK

H-BOMB TEST A SUCCESS, WHITE HOUSE SAYS

GERMANS COOL TO REUNIFICATION HINTS

After the first instant of disorientation was over, Karn made the necessary adjustments in his metabolism to calm himself. The newspaper was a journal of a world of nightmares. He found himself near a small park breaking up the busy streets, and on uncertain legs he made his way to a bench and sat heavily down.

Next to him a stubblefaced man said, "You look sick, buddy. Everything O.K.?"

Karn had enough control of himself to find the right words. "My horse didn't make it, that's all. Stay away from sure things."

"A-men, pal!"

Karn smiled to himself. It was good to know he could handle a Terran colloquial conversation so skillfully. But the smile vanished as he returned his attention to the newspaper. He read it carefully and in detail, memorizing blocks of information as he went, and within fifteen minutes he had read his way through from end to end and could begin shaping the scattered data into a pattern.

Everything had gone completely haywire.

Germany was a fifth-rate country now, not the kingpin. Apparently there had been some sort of second Great War in the past few decades; Germany had been beaten and now lay helplessly divided. The powers on Earth today were the United States and Russia, glaring at each other menacingly in an uneasy stalemate.

Technological development had been catastrophically rapid. The infernal creatures had not only developed fission weapons but fusion ones as well, and evidently fission-fusion-fission bombs to boot. Work was progressing on control of thermonuclear energy.

And, spurred on by the threat of atomic war, a vast missile program was under way, and almost as a by-product of the arms race space was being conquered. The unbelievable Earthers had hoisted more than a dozen space satellites into orbit, and work was advancing on the problem of reaching the Moon by rocket.

Karn's mind automatically supplied the gloomy extrapolation. The Moon in five years or less, the other planets by the end of the century, then a lull while a nullspace drive is invented, and then the conquest of the stars. Exactly as the first scouts had foreseen a century ago, only faster. How could this be possible? All his work of 1914-16 had gone completely to waste. If anything, things were worse than they would have been if he hadn't meddled.

None of it made any sense.

Karn knew what he had to do now. First, find a library and discover how

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this state of affairs had come about. Second, contact Hethivar by subradio and let them know the situation. If ever there were a case for passing the buck, this was it. Something had to be done, and fast. But Karn was in no mood for making top-level decisions. Right now it was all he could do to cling to his sanity in the face of what had happened.

He found the nearest library and located a bulky World History, and scanned it rapidly, beginning in the mid-Nineteenth Century and working forward. When he was finished, he was as close to sheer panic as he had ever been in his long life. It was an effort simply to hang on to his physical manifestation and keep from wavering. It was necessary for him to go through all nine of the Stabilizing Exercises, one after another—a humiliating experience for one who had always prided himself on his coolness.

But yet what he had discovered could easily have destabilized a lesser man.

Terran history ran precisely as it should have run, right up to 1914. The pressures of industrialization and the stresses of upsurging nationalism had built up conflicts certain to erupt into war, in the latter half of the nineteenth century. That was as expected. In 1914, the war had broken out. That, too, was acceptable. The The Hethivarian Planners had decided to permit the war to begin, as a sort of catharsis for the Earthers, but to end the war before any serious changes in the Terran way of life could be brought about.

Yet the war had *not* ended at Dusseldorf in 1916, Karn discovered. Maddeningly, there was no mention of the Allied surrender nor of the Treaty of Dusseldorf. Instead, the Germans had gone ahead and provoked America into entering the war in 1917; almost simultaneously, the Russian revolutionists had successfully overthrown the Czar. It was an unbelievable jolt to read of Germany's defeat, then of the foolish and suicidal peace settlement of 1919.

Defeated Germany had rebuilt its strength, with a madman named Hitler feeding on wounded national pride. And Russia had blindingly leaped into the twentieth century, shedding its medieval past and becoming an important world power overnight. Then, a second War, America drawn once again—and this time permanently—from its isolationist shell, Germany and its new ally Japan decisively crushed, Russia advancing to dominate half the world, atomic weapons actually used in battle—

Nightmare, Karn thought.

He searched through rows of books, hoping to find but one mention of the Treaty of Dusseldorf, his masterpiece, which had brought all Terran friction to a halt. Not one index had an entry of that sort. Panic assailed him. His grip on the universe tottered.

It was as if he had never come to Earth to end the Great War. Not one of his interventions had as much as

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survived in the pages of history. And matters stood at a dreadful impasse right now. The Earthers had already conquered space—twenty years ahead of the original extrapolation, a century or more ahead of Karn's revised estimate.

Earth hovered on the brink of self-destruction. That would be too bad for Earth, Karn thought. But—far worse for the galaxy as a whole—Earth also hovered at the edge of its space age. Nightmare of nightmares!

Hethivar had to be told of this. Immediately, before Karn could make another move. Hethivar had to know.

It was a simple matter to enter a washroom on the third floor of the library building and depart autokinetically for the New Jersey meadow. No one had seen him enter the washroom, and so no one would be perturbed by his failure to come out.

Arriving at the meadow with virtual instantaneity, Karn activated the scrambler key long enough for him to enter his ship, then once again returned to concealment. Switching on the subspace communicator, he framed a message to the Hethivarian Planners:

Esteemed Sirs:

The report of Karn 1832j4, assigned to Terran Manipulation. Good sirs, matters here have reached an unaccountable state. Manipulation activity of the previous visit has been totally negated. The Earthers have fought a second war and now have developed atomic weapons and orbital satellites. Our worst fears have come to pass. Unless immediate action is taken the Earthers will be knocking at our gates within a century.

I am unable to explain the failure of the previous mission. Obviously we must restudy our entire science of probability. But one conclusion is certain; no amount of manipulation can halt the trends already set in motion. Our only course now is a drastic one. If we are to prevent the Earthers from entering space, we may no longer strive to check war on Earth, but rather now we must foment it.

It would be a simple matter of elementary tactics for me to instigate an atomic war on Earth, considering the uneasy international condition here. Such a war would probably not result in total destruction of Terran life, but would certainly set them back many hundreds of years. Of course, this drastic step contravenes our general ethical pattern, and so I dare not take action of this sort without your permission. Yet, good sirs, surely you will see that the destiny of the galaxy is at stake here. I will await your word.

He added his wave length, so they would be able to reach him with a reply, and signed off.

There, he thought. *That should make them sweat a little!*

Subspace communication is not quite instantaneous. There would be a lag of several minutes before the Planners received his message, and it might be hours before they had decided on their reply. Well, a few hours were not likely to make much

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difference. He sat back to wait.

Touching off the atomic war would be child's play, he thought. All it took was a spark in the tinder—an atomic explosion obliterating some large American or Russian city, preferably both. Within minutes, jittery defense bases would send the missiles flying. Karn's nature was such that he found the idea of such a war repugnant. But still, if it were necessary—

He still could not understand how his calculations had gone so far astray. Bitterly he saw that it was a mistake to allow Earth fifty years of nonintervention; there should have been a Hethivarian agent here every moment of the time, instead of leaving the planet alone. Hethivar had complacently relied on its extrapolations. As he looked back, it seemed an enormously shortsighted way of handling the situation. But they had been so *confident*. Well, hindsight never helped anyone, Karn thought. The only path left was the barbarous but mandatory one of smashing Earth, or rather causing Earth to smash itself.

But—

His reflections were cut off by the whirring sound of the subradio printer. A message coming back so soon? Why, they had barely had time to consider! Obviously they had met at once and voted him *carte blanche*.

The message said:

Karn, you blasted idiot—

Are you out of your head? Your message makes no sense at all. Your job is to avoid that atomic war, not to touch it off. And what's this jabber about preventing the Earthers from entering space? Why should we do that? And why did you change your wave length?

Since you seem to have taken leave of your senses, you are to return to Hethivar at once. A replacement will be sent you. And if you meddle destructively in Terran affairs you'll get immediate personality disruption when we catch you.

If this is your idea of a joke, be advised that we aren't amused. And you'd better have a good explanation when you get back here.

Adric
For the Planners

Bewildered, Karn let the message slip through numb fingers. He fought to restabilize himself, and had to run through the nine Stabilizing Exercises twice. This jolt, coming on top of the earlier one, left him reeling. Had the whole universe gone mad? He was dumfounded by Adric's message. What was he talking about? What did he mean?

Karn pondered a return message. He had gotten no further than *Highly Esteemed Sirs* when his mind unmistakably detected Hethivarian life-impressions somewhere on the planet.

His outlines blurred in dazed puzzlement. No other Hethivarian was supposed to be within a parsec of Earth at this time. True, Adric had said something about a replacement being shipped out—but it took many

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weeks to make the trip from Hethivar to Earth. Who could the stranger be? Cautiously, Karn extended a tendril of perception—

. . . Encountered another mind, a Hethivarian mind . . .

. . . Touched . . .

. . . Recoiled in shock.

The stranger was himself!

There had been no doubt about it. Their minds had met for only a microsecond, but yet Karn had learned that the other one was Karn 1832j4, newly arrived on Earth to engage in manipulation. He had touched the surface of that other mind, and its thought-forms were his thought-forms.

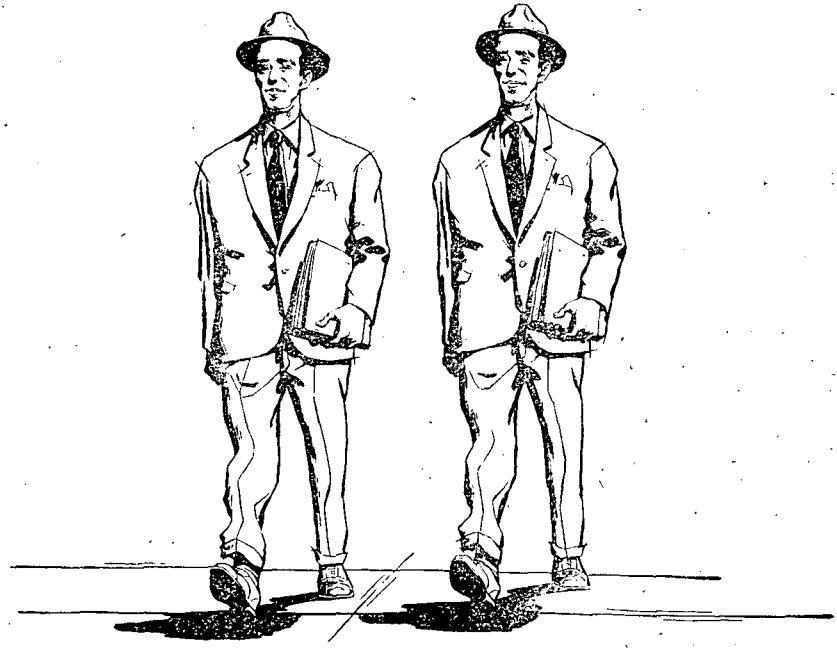
Karn gripped the walls of his ship and waited for the universe to stop spinning around him. This was what insanity was like, he thought.

A quiet voice said, "Would you mind telling me just who the devil you are?"

Karn realized the other being had come to him. He smiled and said, "You're an hallucination. Go away."

"I'm Karn. And so are you, it seems."

The other wore the body of an Earther, somewhat older, paunchy, balding. But as Karn watched the Earther's visage gave way, in an instantaneous transition, to Karn's own. It was not like looking in the mirror, for the mirror reverses an image. This was the actual face of Karn, unfamil-



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iar to him since he had never looked upon it in this fashion.

"We can't both be Karn," Karn said hoarsely.

"Have a look," the stranger replied, and extended his mind once again. Karn was reluctant to blend a second time; he attempted a barrier, but he was too late, and their minds joined. Karn looked deep. He saw his own thoughts laid out as neatly as he kept them, all his own memories of Hethivar. Yes, the other was himself.

But yet not himself. For mingled with the familiar memories were a host of unfamiliar ones. The other had arrived on Earth only minutes before, it seemed. But this was his third or fourth visit. He came to Earth regularly; his job was to protect the planet, to keep it from doing real harm to itself, to guide Earth along into space and into brotherhood with Hethivar.

It was like looking into a distorting mirror.

"You're here to aid Earth," Karn said.

"Yes. And you to destroy it. Destroy or else cripple. To keep the Earthers bottled up on their own world, where they can't harm the Network."

"And you're me," Karn said. "And I'm you. But we're opposite."

"Curious, isn't it? And what's this Treaty of Dusseldorf that stands out so in your mind?"

Karn said, "I arranged it, in 1916. It was supposed to provide Earth with long-lasting peace."

"To turn the Earthers into a bunch of sleepy vegetables, you mean. To rob Earth of the inner conflicts that would drive them into space eventually."

"And you *want* Earth to spread into space?"

"Of course," the other Karn said. "That's been our policy ever since our scouts saw Earth's potential. They're potentially the finest thing the universe has ever produced—but they have flaws. So we help them overcome their flaws. You think the Hethivari Network is going to last forever?"

"No, but—"

"So why fight the inevitable? We recognize that the Earthers are potentially the next rulers of the galaxy. O.K. We take it gracefully and bow out. We don't attempt the hopeless job of trying to hold them down forever, nor do we destroy them now while we think we can. I'm here to simmer down some of their energy—to keep them from blowing themselves up, but to make sure that they rechannel those boiling drives of theirs *outward,* toward space. They're heading that way now. The Planners sent me here to make sure they get there."

Karn had never heard such a recital of insanity before in his life. But he saw clearly what had happened now. He knew why none of the history books mentioned the Treaty of Dusseldorf.

He felt an instant of sick fear. A

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moment later it subsided as he regained his self-control.

"I'm in trouble," he said.

"I'll bet you are!"

"Somehow I shifted out of my own world line when leaving null-space. I don't belong here at all."

Brusquely Karn made his way past the other to the control chamber. Sitting down at the control panel, he ran off a quick recheck of all the factors that had governed his conversion from the null-continuum onto Earth's world line. It took only a few moments to find the discrepancy. He looked up at the other, his heart leaden.

"Find your mistake?" the other asked.

Karn's facial tendrils quivered in self-annoyance and shame. "Yes. I made a translation error of nearly one per cent. I came out along the wrong world line. This isn't my universe."

"Of course not."

"And that explains why everything seemed so wrong here. The Earth *I* knew would never have sent up space satellites, nor discovered atomics. The Earth I knew would be a peaceful world."

"A vegetating world," the other snapped scornfully.

Karn scowled at him. "A world that poses no threat to the Hethivari Network, at any rate. I'm glad this isn't *my* world line. I'd hate to be alive when the Earthers come swarming over our world and make us slaves. And you'll have no one to thank but yourselves."

"We'll take the risk," the other Karn rejoined sourly. "But what do you plan to do now?"

"Get out of this insane world line and back to my own, as fast as I can. I have important work to do."

"Suppressing Earth's culture?"

"Insuring Hethivar's future," Karn said thinly. He went on. "I sent a message back to the Planners a little while ago. They thought it came from you, and since it didn't make any sense they ordered my recall—your recall that is. You'd better get in touch with them and tell them what happened."

"I'll do that. Will you need any help in departing from Earth?"

Karn's eye-slits narrowed contemptuously. "I'm capable of getting back to my own world line, thanks. It's not that hard to retrace my steps. And then I can continue my work."

"Continuing the job of bottling Earth up?"

"In my world line," Karn said with a trace of impatience, "the preservation of Hethivar is more important to us then the coddling of Earthers. Go ahead and be altruistic—or asinine; same thing. Luckily, my world line doesn't have to face the consequences of your actions." He chuckled. "In fact, strictly speaking, you don't even exist."

The other said testily, "May I remind you that at the moment we're both in *my* world line—and therefore *you're* the nonexistent one?"

"I'll grant the point," Karn said reluctantly. "But soon I'll be back in my own continuum—the one in

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which I negotiated the Treaty of Dusseldorf. The one in which the Hethivari Network will endure for eternity to come, untroubled by Earthers."

"I wish you luck," the other said dryly, and was gone.

What had happened to Karn was humiliating and annoying, but not irremediable. He had been guilty of hasty calculating, that was all; nullspace has infinite exits, and he had chosen the exit adjoining his own. Exploring probability - worlds was something Karn preferred to leave to philosophers, poets, and other dreamers; he liked to stick to solid reality, the one *real* world line. All the others were mere phantoms—including, he thought in relief, the one he had just left. Earth satellites and atomics indeed! Nightmare!

He blasted off from the New Jersey meadow immediately, and, carrying each calculation out to a dozen places this time, retraced his steps, returning the ship to orbit, then converting to nullspace, finally retranslating back into what he hoped was his own world line. He had done the routine arithmetic with scrupulous care this time. He had small fear of a second error.

He thought about the *other* Earth, the *other* Karn, as he expertly guided his ship toward Earth a second time. Karn was no narrow fool; he could understand altruism—but not suicidal altruism. It was incredible to hear someone with his own name and identity declaring solemnly and with a straight face that the proper thing to do was to *help* Earth attain space.

It was fantastic. But, Karn thought, that was what made probability-worlds, after all. Now, in *this* world line, in the *real* universe—

He brought the ship down toward Earth and was relieved to see no orbital satellites whirling round the planet. And his radiation detectors picked up no evidence of nuclear explosions; the particle count was comfortably normal for a world that had not yet learned to harness the power of the atom—for a world that never would learn to harness it.

Karn felt warm relief. This was the world of the Treaty of Dusseldorf, at last.

Calmly and confidently, he guided the ship through the upper atmospheric levels, down toward the same pleasantly green New Jersey meadow he had used for a landing area in that other world, the world he now wanted to forget. He landed under scramblers once again; there was quite possibly no need for them, but Karn had always been cautious and now was doubly so.

He noted the time of landing in his records and prepared to leave the ship. Suddenly he sensed another intelligence nearby. For a wild instant he thought it was another Hethivari, that he had blundered once again and landed in yet another world line than his own. But he calmed himself and realized that this was definitely alien, definitely an Earther—

Entering the ship that was suppos-

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ed to be undetectable by any method save neutrino-detector.

The Earther took form to Karn's left, against the inner wall of the ship. He was of medium height, stocky, with untidy reddish hair and coarse features. Shocked, Karn was caught midway between his own physical form and the Earthbody he adopted when dealing with the Earthers. The Hethivari completed the change numbly, aghast at the presence of the Earther inside his ship.

"You didn't need to change shapes," the Earther said mildly. "I can see you perfectly well as you really are. Short and squat, with wavy tendrils on your face, and that big eye in the middle of your skull—"

"How did you get in here?" Karn whispered hoarsely.

"Through the wall, of course. Haven't you ever heard of intermolecular penetration? It's a matter of judging the individual magnetic moments, and pushing aside the—"

"Never mind the explanation," Karn said weakly. "I know how it's done. But I didn't know Earthers could autokineticize."

"We haven't been doing it long. I left the Institute five years ago, and I was in the first graduating class. My name is Henrichs, by the way. Are you *really* from another star?"

Karn didn't answer. Terror was sweeping through him, threatening to destabilize him. It was all he could do to hang onto the Earthbody he wore, and not slip back to his own form. And he realized dimly that there was no longer any need for maintaining the pretense, that this was an Earther who could see his real identity, who could autokineticize, who could enter minds as only a Hethivari could—

Karn's mind reeled. *It must be another world line, he thought frantically. But that's impossible. I checked everything a dozen times.*

He had to know. His mind reached toward the smiling Earther's—and recoiled.

"You can put up a barrier, too?" Karn asked.

"Of course. Can't you?"

"I . . . Will you let me enter your mind?" Karn asked.

"What for?"

"I want to find out . . . find out what universe I'm in," he said in a weak, tired voice.

The Earther lifted the barrier. A moment later, Karn wished he hadn't.

He saw the history of Earth laid out neatly for him in the Earther's mind, as neatly as it had been put in via some history course long before. The course of events followed expectation; with a touch of smugness Karn saw that the Treaty of Dusseldorf *had* existed in this world.

The World War had come to a conclusion in 1916. Karn's work had been successful; the pressures of war had been removed from Earth. But war, it seemed, was not the only stimulus to development. Karn absorbed the history of the years after 1916 with steadily mounting disbelief.

The Earthers had settled down to

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lives of peaceful, quiet contemplation. There had been many technological advances, of course; radio had become a commercially practicable affair early in the 1920s, aviation had been improved, medicine had taken some steps forward. But there was none of the skyrocketing technological achievement of that other world, the one of the Earth satellite programs and atomic power. Atomics was only a hazy concept in the back of the Earther's mind.

But—behind their national barriers, now safeguarded by the just and wise Treaty—these Earthers had developed other skills. Mental skills. Someone named Chalmers had developed the techniques of autokinetics; someone named Resslin had perfected direct communication. And—Karn was appalled—these Earthers seemed to have carried the skills of teleportation to heights undreamed-of even in the Hethivari Network, which had practiced the power for centuries. On Hethivar, no one even considered making an autokinetic jaunt greater than a single planetary diameter—while these Earthers seemed to have made trips all throughout their own solar system in the past few years.

Was the technique different? Or did these Earthers use the same method, but manage it more efficiently, so that they could teleport greater distances? Karn probed deeper. The technique was the same.

That meant—

"You haven't answered my question," Henrichs said. "Do you really come from another star? We've never really tried hopping as far as even Alpha Centauri yet, but if there's life out there—"

Karn shuddered. It took weeks for him to make the trip from Hethivar to Earth by nullspace drive. And this Earther was talking about an instantaneous autokinetic hop! Inconceivable!

"I'd like to know the name of your star," Henrichs persisted. "Maybe we can visit it some day. We're just at the beginning of this thing, you know, but there's never any telling how far we can travel."

Karn felt the Earther probing at his mind, seeking to know the location of the Hethivari Network. In sudden terror he slammed down the barrier, but it was too little and too late; he felt the Earther pounce on the information.

"No, you can't—"

Karn let his words die away. The Earther was gone.

Karn left Earth several minutes later, sending a radio message ahead to Hethivar that he was returning with very serious news. And very serious it was, indeed.

His manipulations of 1916 had worked out well—too well. Much too well. He had throttled Terran technology so splendidly that their innate drive had forced them to a breakthrough in another, and even more dangerous field. Karn had thought the phantom probability-world was a nightmare; it was a rosy daydream, compared with this!

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Teleportation for billions of miles. Unstoppable entry into ships supposedly invisible. Mental barriers that could not be broken. The thought of what these Earthers had accomplished in a few years' time chilled him—especially when he thought of the years that lay ahead. There had to be limits to what these Earthers could do, but Karn had difficulty visualizing those limits.

He fell into morbid brooding on the return voyage. He realized now that it had been futile to attempt to manipulate the Earthers at all. In that other probability-world, his alter ego had conceded the futility of holding the Earthers back, and instead was encouraging them, leading them on to the normal mechanical conquest of space.

Karn and his world had tried a different method, and succeeded so well that they had perhaps hastened their own downfall by centuries. He pictured a cosmos full of these Terrans, jaunting from world to world while the Hethivari lumbered along in clumsy nullspace ships—

It took six weeks for him to reach his home world again. From fifty thousand miles up it looked magnificent; he thrilled at the sight of the sweeping pastel-shaded towers standing nobly in the red-and-gold sunlight of mid-afternoon. He thumbed for direct contact with the Planners. At this distance, telepathy was impossible for him; he would have to radio.

Adric answered. "About time we heard from you, Karn."

"A thousand pardons, Esteemed One. But the news I bring—frightful! Despite our best attempt at holding them back, the Earthers have reached space anyway." Karn scowled glumly. He and all his people had failed. But had the task been possible in the first place? Perhaps the Earthers, driven by some force beyond all logic, could not *have* been held back. Trying to stop them was like attempting to hold back the sea with a toothpick. "They've developed some form of autokinetics that lets them travel huge distances," Karn went on. "I greatly fear—"

Adric interrupted acidly. "Karn, you blitherer, shut up and bring your ship down to land!"

"Esteemed One, I hope you don't blame *me* for—"

"I'm not blaming anyone for what happened," Adric said. The Noble Planner sounded tired, weary, defeated. "But what you're telling me isn't any news. I know all about it."

"You know—"

"Yes," the Planner said. "The first Terran Ambassador showed up here six weeks ago. He didn't need a ship to get here." In an expressionless voice the highest lord of the Hethivari Network said, "We signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Earthers weeks ago. We signed it on *their* terms."

THE END

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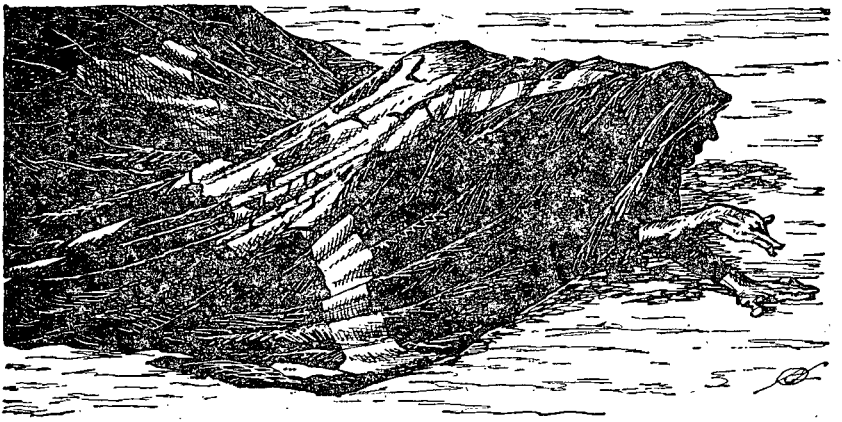
THE PIRATES OF ERSATZ



BY MURRAY LEINSTER

Second of Three Parts. *It's sometimes very hard to do a man a favor—particularly when what he needs is what he despises. But with patience, persistence, good humor, argument, tact, diplomacy and mostly with a blaster, progress can be made....*

Illustrated by Freas

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SYNOPSIS

Bron Hoddan can see no future in space-piracy as practiced by all his relatives on his home world of Zan, so he goes to Walden to accomplish great things, grow rich, and marry a charming girl. Walden, of course, is the most civilized planet in this part of the galaxy. Hoddan has prepared himself to be an electronic engineer, but finds that Walden wants no improvements. To get attention paid to a broadcast-power receptor he has devised, he secretly installs it in a power station and smashes the original unit so his takes over. But when it's discovered he's arrested and charged with every crime from burglary to mayhem. At his trial everybody is scared but himself. His device has been melted down, his drawings burned, and every effort is made to keep anything from being revealed. But he's locked up until somebody posts bond that he won't do such a thing again. Then somebody tells him that his device made death rays which killed a man outside the power station, his bond has been set at fifty million credits—which nobody will post—and he's locked up for life so he can't tell anybody else how to make death rays.

It's absurd. He escapes, in a manner to infuriate the police. He takes sanctuary in the Interstellar Embassy, where the Interstellar Ambassador agrees that death rays are impossible, tells him that Walden is on the brink of decadence from complacency, and offers him transportation away. He has a letter from a feudal nobleman on Darth, one Don Loris, asking for an electronic engineer to be sent him. If Hoddan wants that opening—

Hoddan bitterly accepts. But the Waldenian government demands his surrender from the Embassy, rings it about with cops, and lures him outside into an ambush by a forged note from a girl named Nedda, whom Hoddan has been thinking of marrying. But Hoddan was suspicious and went prepared. So he literally scorches the pants off the cops in ambush, captures a dozen stun-pistols, and again infuriates the cops by the way he gets back to the Embassy.

To get to the spaceport he has again to infuriate the planetary authorities, and the Ambassador congratulates him sedately. The space liner takes off, stops briefly at the bustling world of Krim, and lands him on Darth, which is a feudal-system planet without even broadcast power. The local customs are remarkable. His possessions are appropriated by the first-comers as of right. He recharges a stun-pistol from the spaceport equipment, recovers his possessions by knocking out those who had them, and finds that one of the looters is a certain Thal, a retainer of Don Loris, there at the spaceport to meet him. Then friends of the looters essay to lynch him for resisting robbery, he defeats them, and Thal happily picks their pockets —another local custom—and they ride for Don Loris' castle. Sunset comes as they ride, and three bright lights flash across the sky. They are

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spaceships in orbit. Hoddan gloomily considers that Walden sent them after him.

When Don Loris hears that stun-pistols were used on Darth, he laments it bitterly. He had plans, which that fact messes up. Hoddan and Thal have to vanish. Immediately. But he has some nice cozy dungeons. They'll be comfortable . . . But Don Loris' daughter, Fani, interposes. She's refused to marry a local chieftain, and by Darthian custom he will be considered a man of no spirit unless he kidnaps and marries her anyhow. So she's followed everywhere by guards, and after Hoddan's triumphant fighting at the spaceport she wants him for a guard. But in the middle of the night her suitor breaks in or bribes his way into the castle, carries her off, and there is nobody with any hope of rescuing her but Hoddan. He pursues gloomily with a dozen men he instructs in the use of stun-pistols on the way. Soon they are ambushed by some of Ghek's men.

PART 2

CHAPTER V

HODDAN swore from the depths of a very considerable vocabulary.

"You (censored)—(deleted)—(omitted)—(unprintability)", he roared. "Get back up on your horse or I blast you and leave you for Ghek's men to handle when they're able to move about again! Get back on that horse! One—two—"

The man got back on the horse.

"Now go on ahead," rasped Hoddan. "All of you! I'm going to count you!"

The dozen horsemen from Don Loris' stronghold rode reluctantly on ahead. He did count them. He rode on, shepherding them before him.

"Ghek," he told them in a blood-curdling tone, "has a bigger prize than any cash you'll plunder from one of his shot-down retainers! He's got the Lady Fani! He won't stop before he has her behind castle walls! We've got to catch up with him! Do you want to try to climb into his castle by your fingernails? You'll do it if he gets there first!"

The horses moved a little faster. Thal said with surprising humility:

"If we force our horses too much, they'll be exhausted before we can catch up."

"Figure it out," snapped Hoddan. "We have to catch up!"

He settled down to more of the acute discomfort that riding was to him. He did not think again of the ambush. It had happened, and it had failed. Four-fifths of the raiding party that had fought its way into Don Loris' stronghold and out again, had been waiting for pursuers atop a certain bit of rising ground. They'd known their pursuers must come this way. There were certain passes through the low but rugged hills. One went this way or that, but no other. Their blood already warmed

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by past fighting, when Hoddan and his dozen seemed to ride right into destruction, they flung themselves into a charge.

But Hoddan had a stun-pistol set for continuous fire. He used it like a hose or a machine gun, painstakingly sweeping it across the night before him, neither too fast nor too slowly. It affected the rushing followers of Lord Ghek exactly as if it had been an over-sized meat-chopper. They went down. Only three men remained in their saddles—they'd probably been sheltered by the bodies of men ahead. Hoddan attended to those three with individual, personalized stun-pistol bolts—and immediately had trouble with his men, who wanted to dismount and plunder their fallen enemies.

He wouldn't even let them collect the horses of the men now out of action. It would cost time, and Ghek wouldn't be losing any that he could help. With a raging, trembling girl as prisoner, most men would want to get her behind battlements as soon as possible. But Hoddan knew that his party was slowed down by him. Presently he began to feel bitterly sure that Ghek would reach his castle before he was overtaken.

"This place he's heading for," he said discouragedly to Thal. "Any chance of our rushing it?"

"Oh, no!" said Thal dolefully. "Ten men could hold it against a thousand!"

"Then can't we make better time?"

Thal said resignedly:

"Ghek probably had fresh horses waiting, so he could keep on at top speed in his flight. I doubt we will catch him, now."

"The Lady Fani," said Hoddan bitterly, "has put me in a fix so if I don't fight him I'm ruined!"

"Disgraced," corrected Thal. He said mournfully, "It's the same thing."

Gloom descended on the whole party as it filled their leaders. Insensibly, the pace of the horses slackened still more. They had done well. But a horse that can cover fifty miles a day at its own gait, can be exhausted in ten or less, if pushed. By the time Hoddan and his men were within two miles of Ghek's castle, their mounts were extremely reluctant to move faster than a walk. At a mile, they were kept in motion only by kicks.

The route they followed was specific. There was no choice of routes, here in the hills. They could only follow every twist and turn of the trail, among steep mountain-flanks and minor peaks. But suddenly they came to a clear wide valley, yellow cressets burned at its upper end, no more than half a mile distant. They showed a castle gate, open, with the last of a party of horsemen filing into it. Even as Hoddan swore, the gate closed. Faint shouts of triumph came from inside the castle walls to the completely frustrated pursuers without.

"I'd have bet on this," said Hoddan miserably. "Stop here, Thal.

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Pick out a couple of your more hang-dog characters and fix them up with their hands apparently tied behind their backs. We take a breather for five minutes—no more."

He would not let any man dismount. He shifted himself about on his own saddle, trying to find a comfortable way to sit. He failed. At the end of five minutes he gave orders. There were still shouts occasionally from within Ghek's castle. They had that unrhythmic frequency which suggested that they were responses to a speech. Ghek was making a fine, dramatic spectacle of his capture of an unwilling bride. He was addressing his retainers and saying that through their fine loyalty, co-operation and willingness to risk all for their chieftain, they now had the Lady Fani to be their chatelaine. He thanked them from the bottom of his heart and they were invited to the official wedding, which would take place sometime tomorrow, most likely.

Before the speech was quite finished, however, Hoddan and his weary following rode up into the patch of light cast by the cressets outside the walls. Thal bellowed to the battlements.

"Prisoners!" he roared, according to instructions from Hoddan. "We caught some prisoners in the ambush! They got fancy news! Tell Lord Ghek he'd better get their story right off! No time to waste! Urgent!"

Hoddan played the part of one prisoner, just in case anybody noticed from above that one man rode as if either entirely unskilled in riding or else injured in a fight.

He heard shoutings, over the walls. He glared at his men and they drooped in their saddles. The gate creaked open and the horsemen from Don Loris' castle filed inside. They showed no elation, because Hoddan had promised to ram a spear-shaft its full length down the throat of any man who gave away his stratagem ahead of time. The gate closed behind them. Men appeared to take their horses. This could have revealed that the newcomers were strangers, but Ghek would have recruited new and extra retainers for the emergency of tonight. There would be many strange faces in his castle just now.

"Good fight, eh?" bellowed an ancient, long-retired retainer with a wine bottle in his hand.

"Good fight!" agreed Thal.

"Good plunder, eh?" bellowed the ancient above the heads of younger men. "Like the good old days?"

"Better!" boomed Thal.

At just this instant the young Lord Ghek appeared. There were scratches on his cheek, acquired during the ride with Fani across his saddlebow. He looked thrilled by his victory but uneasy about his prize.

"What's this about prisoners with fancy news?" he demanded. "What is it?"

"Don Loris!" whooped Thal. "Long Live the Lady Fani!"

Hoddan painstakingly opened fire with the continuous-fire stud of this pistol—his third tonight—pressed down. The merrymakers in the court-

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yard wavered and went down in windrows. Thal opened fire with a stun-pistol. The others bellowed and began to fling bolts at every living thing they saw.

"To the Lady Fani!" rasped Hoddan, getting off his horse with as many creakings as the castle gate.

His followers now rushed, dismounting where they had to. They fired with reckless abandon. A stun-pistol, which does not kill, imposes few restraints upon its user. If you shoot somebody who doesn't need to be shot, he may not like it but he isn't permanently harmed. So the twelve who'd followed Hoddan poured in what would have been a murderous fire if they'd been shooting bullets, but was no worse than devastating as matters stood.

There were screams and flight and utterly hopeless defiances by sword-armed and spear-armed men. In instants Hoddan went limping into the castle with Thal by his side, searching for Fani. Ghek had not fallen at the first fire. He vanished, and the castle was plainly fallen and he made no attempt to lead resistance against its invaders. Hoddan's men went raging happily through corridors and halls as they came to them. They used their stun-pistols with zest and at such close quarters with considerable effect. Hoddan heard Fani scream angrily and he and Thal went swiftly to see. They came upon the young Lord Ghek trying to let Fani down out of a window on a rope. He undoubtedly intended to follow her and complete his abduction on the run. But Fani bit him, and Hoddan said vexedly:

"Look here! It seems that I'm disgraced if I don't fight you somehow—"

The young Lord Ghek rushed him, sword out, eyes blazing in a fine frenzy of despair. Hoddan brought him down with a buzz of the stun-gun.

One of Hoddan's followers came hunting for him.

"Sir," he sputtered, "we got the garrison cornered in their quarters, and we've been picking them off through the windows, and they think they're dropping dead and want to surrender. Shall we let 'em?"

"By all means," Hoddan said irritably. "And Thal, go get something heavier than a nightgown for the Lady Fani to wear, and then do what plundering is practical. But I want to be out of here in half an hour. Understand?"

"I'll attend to the costume," said the Lady Fani vengefully. "You cut his throat while I'm getting dressed."

She nodded at the unconscious Lord Ghek on the pavement. She disappeared through a door nearby. Hoddan could guess that Ghek would have prepared something elaborate in the way of a trousseau for the bride he was to carry screaming from her home. Somehow it was the sort of thing a Darthian would do. Now Fani would enjoyably attire herself in the best of it while—

"Thal," said Hoddan, "help me

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get this character into a closet somewhere. He's not to be killed. I don't like him, but at this moment I don't like anybody very much, and I won't play favorites."

Thal dragged the insensible young nobleman into the next room. Hoddan locked the door and pocketed the key as Fani came into view again. She was splendidly attired, now, in brocade and jewels. Ghek had evidently hoped to placate her after marriage by things of that sort and had spent lavishly for them.

Now, throughout the castle there were many and diverse noises. Sometimes—not often—there was still the crackling hum of a stun-pistol. There were many more exuberant shoutings. They apparently had to do with loot. There were some squealings in female voices, but many more gigglings.

"I need not say," said the Lady Fani with dignity, "that I thank you very much. But I do say so."

"You're quite welcome," said Hoddan politely.

"And what are you going to do now?"

"I imagine," said Hoddan, "that we'll go down into the courtyard where our horses are. I gave my men half an hour to loot in. During that half hour I shall sit down on something which will, I hope, remain perfectly still. And I may," he added morbidly, "eat an apple. I've had nothing to eat since I landed on Darth. People don't want to commit themselves to not cutting my throat. But after half an hour we'll leave."

The Lady Fani looked sympathetic.

"But the castle's surrendered to you," she protested. "You hold it! Aren't you going to try to keep it?"

"There are a good many unpleasant characters out yonder," said Hoddan, waving his hand at the great outdoors, "who've reason to dislike me very much. They'll be anxious to express their emotions, when they feel up to it. I want to dodge them. And presently the people in this castle will realize that even stun-pistols can't keep on shooting indefinitely here. I don't want to be around when it occurs to them."

He offered his arm with a reasonably grand air and went limping with her down to the courtyard just inside the gate. Two of Don Loris' retainers staggered into view as they arrived, piling up plunder which ranged from a quarter keg of wine to a mass of frothy stuff which must be female garments. They went away and other men arrived loaded down with their own accumulations of loot. Some of the local inhabitants looked on with uneasy indignation.

Hoddan found a bench and sat down. He conspicuously displayed one of the weapons which had captured the castle. Ghek's defeated retainers looked at him darkly.

"Bring me something to eat," commanded Hoddan. "Then if you bring fresh horses for my men, and one extra for each to carry his plunder on, I'll take them away. I'll even throw in the Lord Ghek, who is now

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unharmed but with his life in the balance. Otherwise—"

He moved the pistol suggestively. The normal inhabitants of Ghek's castle moved away, discussing the situation in subdued voices.

The Lady Fani sat down proudly on the bench beside him.

"You are wonderful!" she said with conviction.

"I used to cherish that illusion myself," said Hoddan.

"But nobody before in all Darthian history has ever fought twenty men, and then thirty men, and destroyed an ambush, and captured a castle, all in one day!"

"And without a meal," said Hoddan darkly, "and with a lot of blisters!"

He considered. Somebody came running with bread and cheese and wine. He bit into the bread and cheese. After a moment he said, his mouth full:

"I once saw a man perform the unparalleled feat of jumping over nine barrels placed in a row. It had never been done before. But I didn't envy him. I never wanted to jump over nine barrels in a row! In the same way, I never especially wanted to fight other men or break up ambushes or capture castles. I want to do what I want to do, not what other people happen to admire."

"Then what do you want to do?" she asked admiringly.

"I'm not sure now," said Hoddan gloomily. He took a fresh bite. "But a little while ago I wanted to do some interesting and useful things in electronics, and get reasonably rich, and marry a delightful girl, and become a prominent citizen on Walden. I think I'll settle for another planet, now."

"My father will make you rich," said the girl proudly. "You saved me from being married to Ghek!"

Hoddan shook his head.

"I've got my doubts," he said. "He had a scheme to import a lot of stun-pistols and arm his retainers with them. Then he meant to rush the spaceport and have me set up a broadcast-power unit that'd keep them charged all the time. Then he'd sit back and enjoy life. Holding the spaceport, nobody else could get stun-weapons, and nobody could resist his retainers who had 'em. So he'd be top man on Darth. He'd have exactly as much power as he chose to seize. I think he cherished that little idea,—and I've given advance publicity to stun-pistols. Now he hasn't a ghost of a chance of pulling it off. I'm afraid he'll be displeased with me."

"I can take care of that!" said Fani confidently. She did not question that her father would be displeased.

"Maybe you can," said Hoddan, "but though he's kept a daughter he's lost a dream. And that's bereavement! I know!"

Horses came plodding into the courtyard with Ghek's retainers driving them. They were anxious to get rid of their conquerors. Hoddan's men came trickling back, with arms-

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ful of plunder to add to the piles they'd previously gathered. Thal took charge, commanding the exchange of saddles from tired to fresh horses and that the booty be packed on the extra mounts. It was time. Nine of the dozen looters were at work on the task when there was a tumult back in the castle. Yellings and the clash of steel. Hoddan shook his head.

"Bad! Somebody's pistol went empty and the local boys found it out. Now we'll have to fight some more—no."

He beckoned to a listening, tense, resentful inhabitant of the castle. He held up the key of the room in which he'd locked young Ghek.

"Now open the castle gate," he commanded, "and fetch out my last three men, and we'll leave without setting fire to anything. The Lord Ghek would like it that way. He's locked up in a room that's particularly inflammable."

The last statement was a guess, only, but Ghek's retainer looked horrified. He bellowed. There was a subtle change in the bitterly hostile atmosphere. Men came angrily to help load the spare horses. Hoddan's last three men came out of a corridor, wiping blood from various scratches and complaining plaintively that their pistols had shot empty and they'd had to defend themselves with knives.

Three minutes later the cavalcade rode out of the castle gate and away into the darkness. Hoddan had arrived here when Ghek was inside with Fani as his prisoner, when there were only a dozen men without and at least a hundred inside to defend the walls. And the castle was considered impregnable.

In half an hour Hoddan's followers had taken the castle, rescued Fani, looted it superficially, gotten fresh horses for themselves and spare ones for their plunder, and were headed away again. In only one respect were they worse off than when they arrived. Some stun-pistols were empty.

Hoddan searched the sky and pieced together the star-pattern he'd noted before.

"Hold it!" he said sharply to Thal. "We don't go back the same way we came! The gang that ambushed us will be stirring around again, and we haven't got full stun-pistols now! We make a wide circle around those characters!"

"Why?" demanded Thal. "There are only so many passes. The only other one is three times as long. And it is disgraceful to avoid a fight—"

"Thal!" snapped an icy voice from beside Hoddan, "you have an order! Obey it!"

Even in the darkness, Hoddan could see Thal jump.

"Yes, my Lady Fani," said Thal shakily. "But we go a long distance roundabout."

The direction of motion through the night now changed. The long line of horses moved in deepest darkness, lessened only by the light of many stars. Even so, in time one's

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eyes grew accustomed and it was a glamorous spectacle — twenty-eight beasts moving through dark defiles and over steep passes among the rugged, ragged hills. From any one spot they seemed at once to swagger and to slink, swaying as they moved on and vanished into obscurity. The small wild things in the night paused affrightedly in their scurryings until they had gone far away.

Fani said in a soft voice:

"This is nice!"

"What's nice about it?" demanded Hoddan.

"Riding like this," said Fani enthusiastically, "with men who have fought for me to guard me in the darkness, with the leader who has rescued me by my side, underneath the stars— It's a delicious feeling!"

"You're used to riding horseback," said Hoddan dourly.

He rode on, while mountains stabbed skyward and the pass they followed wound this way and that and he knew that it was a very roundabout way indeed. And he had unpleasing prospects to make it seem

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less satisfying, even, than it would have been otherwise.

But they came, at last, to a narrow defile which opened out before them and there were no more mountains ahead, but only foothills. And there, far and far away, they could see the sky as vaguely brighter. As they went on, indeed, a glory of red and golden colorings appeared at the horizon.

And out of that magnificence three bright lights suddenly darted. In strict V-formation, they flashed from the sunrise toward the west. They went overhead, more brilliant than the brightest stars, and when partway down to the horizon they suddenly winked out.

"What on Earth are they?" demanded Fani. "I never saw anything like that before!"

"They're spaceships in orbit," said Hoddan. He was as astounded as the girl, but for a different reason. "I thought they'd be landed by now!"

It changed everything. He could not see what the change amounted to, but change there was. For one thing—

"We're going to the spaceport," he told Thal curtly. "We'll recharge our stun-pistols there. I thought those ships had landed. They haven't. Now we'll see if we can keep them aloft! How far to the landing-grid?"

"You insisted," complained Thal, "that we not go back to Don Loris' castle by the way we left it. There are only so many passes through the hills. The only other one is very long. We are only four miles—"

"Then we head there right now!" snapped Hoddan. "And we step up the speed!"

He barked commands to his followers. Thal, puzzled but in dread of acid comment from Fani, bustled up and down the line of men, insisting on a faster pace. And the members of the cavalcade had not pushed these animals as they had their first. Even the lead horses, loaded with loot, managed to get up to a respectable ambling trot. The sunrise proceeded. Dew upon the straggly grass became visible. Separate drops appeared as gems upon the grass blades, and then began gradually to vanish as the sun's disk showed itself. Then the angular metal framework of the landing-grid rose dark against the sunrise sky.

When they rode up to it, Hoddan reflected that it was the only really civilized structure on the planet. Architecturally it was surely the least pleasing. It had been built when Darth was first settled on, and when ideas of commerce and interstellar trade seemed reasonable. It was half a mile high and built of massive metal beams. It loomed hugely overhead when the double file of shaggy horses trotted under its lower arches and across the grass-grown space within it. Hoddan headed purposefully for the control shed. There was no sign of movement anywhere. The steeply gabled roofs of the nearby town showed only the fluttering of tiny birds. No smoke rose from

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chimneys. Yet the slanting morning sunshine was bright.

As Hoddan actually reached the control shed, he saw a sleepy man in the act of putting a key in the door. He dismounted within feet of that man, who turned and blinked sleepily at him, and then immediately looked the reverse of cordial. It was the red-headed man he'd stung with a stun-pistol the day before.

"I've come back," said Hoddan, "for a few more kilowatts."

The red-headed man swore angrily.

"Hush!" said Hoddan gently. "The Lady Fani is with us."

The red-headed man jerked his head around and paled. Thal glowered at him. Others of Don Loris' retainers shifted their positions significantly, to make their oversized belt-knives handier.

"We'll come in," said Hoddan. "Thal, collect the pistols and bring them inside."

Fani swung lightly to the ground and followed him in. She looked curiously at the cables and instrument boards and switches inside. On one wall a red light pulsed, and went out, and pulsed again. The red-headed man looked at it.

"You're being called," said Hoddan. "Don't answer it."

The red-headed man scowled. Thal came in with an armful of stun-pistols in various stages of discharge. Hoddan briskly broke the butt of one of his own and presented it to the terminals he'd used the day before.

"He's not to touch anything, Thal," said Hoddan. To the red-headed man he observed, "I suspect that call's been coming in all night. Something was in orbit at sundown. You closed up shop and went home early, eh?"

"Why not?" rasped the red-headed man. "There's only one ship a month!"

"Sometimes," said Hoddan, "there are specials. But I commend your negligence. It was probably good for me."

He charged one pistol, and snapped its butt shut, and snapped open another, and charged it. There was no difficulty, of course. In minutes all the pistols he'd brought from Walden were ready for use again.

He tucked away as many as he could conveniently carry on his person. He handed the rest to Thal. He went competently to the pulsing call-signal. He put headphones to his ears. He listened. His expression became extremely strange, as if he did not quite understand nor wholly believe what he heard.

"Odd," he said mildly. He considered for a moment or two. Then he rummaged around in the drawers of desks. He found wire clips. He began to snip wires in half.

The red-headed man started forward automatically.

"Take care of him, Thal," said Hoddan.

He cut the microwave receiver free of its wires and cables. He lifted it experimentally and opened part of its case to make sure the thermo battery that would power it in an

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emergency was there and in working order. It was.

"Put this on a horse, Thal," commanded Hoddan. "We're taking it up to Don Loris'."

The red-headed man's mouth dropped open. He said stridently:

"Hey! You can't do that!" Hoddan turned upon him and he said sourly: "All right, you can. I'm not trying to stop you with all those hard cases outside!"

"You can build another in a week," said Hoddan kindly. "You must have spare parts."

Thal carried the communicator outside. Hoddan opened a cabinet, threw switches, and painstakingly cut and snipped and snipped at a tangle of wires within.

"Just your instrumentation," he explained to the appalled red-headed man. "You won't use the grid until you've got this fixed, too. A few days of harder work than you're used to. That's all!"

He led the way out again, and on the way explained to Fani:

"Pretty old-fashioned job, this grid. They make simpler ones nowadays. They'll be able to repair it, though, in time. Now we go back to your father's castle. He may not be pleased, but he should be mollified."

He saw Fani mount lightly into her own saddle and shook his head gloomily. He climbed clumsily into his own. They moved off to return to Don Loris' stronghold. Hoddan suffered.

They reached the castle before noon, and the sight of the Lady Fani riding beside a worn-out Hoddan was productive of enthusiasm and loud cheers. The loot displayed by the returned wayfarers increased the rejoicing. There was envy among the men who had stayed behind. There were respectfully admiring looks cast upon Hoddan. He had displayed, in furnishing opportunities for plunder, the most-admired quality a leader of feudal fighting men could show.

The Lady Fani beamed as she and Thal and Hoddan, all very dusty and travel-stained, presented themselves to her father in the castle's great hall.

"Here's your daughter, sir," said Hoddan, and yawned. "I hope there won't be any further trouble with Ghek. We took his castle and looted it a little and brought back some extra horses. Then we went to the spaceport. I recharged my stun-pistols and put the landing-grid out of order for the time being. I brought away the communicator there." He yawned again. "There's something highly improper going on, up just beyond atmosphere. There are three ships up there in orbit, and they were trying to call the spaceport in nonregulation fashion, and it's possible that some of your neighbors would be interested. So I postponed everything until I could get some sleep. It seemed to me that when better skulduggeries are concocted, that Don Loris and his associates ought to concoct them. And if you'll excuse me—"

He moved away, practically dead

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on his feet. If he had been accustomed to horseback riding, he wouldn't have been so exhausted. But now he yawned, and yawned, and Thal took him to a room quite different from the guest-room-dungeon to which he'd been taken the night before. He noted that the door, this time, opened inward. He braced chairs against it to make sure that nobody could open it from without. He lay down and slept heavily.

He was waked by loud poundings. He roused himself enough to say sleepily:

"Whaddyawant?"

"The lights in the sky!" cried Fani's voice outside the door. "The ones you say are spaceships! It's sunset again, and I just saw them. But there aren't three, now. Now there are nine!"

"All right," said Hoddan. He lay down his head again and thrust it into his pillow. Then he was suddenly very wide awake indeed. He sat up with a start.

Nine spaceships? That wasn't possible! That would be a space fleet! And there were no space fleets! Walden would certainly have never sent more than one ship to demand his surrender to its police. The Space Patrol never needed more than one ship anywhere. Commerce wouldn't cause ships to travel in company. Piracy— There couldn't be a pirate fleet! There'd never be enough loot anywhere to keep it in operation. Nine spaceships at one time—traveling in orbit around a primitive planet like Darth—a fleet of spaceships.

It couldn't happen! Hoddan couldn't conceive of such a thing. But a recently developed pessimism suggested that since everything else, to date, had been to his disadvantage, this was probably a catastrophe also.

He groaned and lay down to sleep again.

VI

When frantic bangings on the propped-shut door awakened him next morning, he confusedly imagined that they were noises in the communicator headphones, and until he heard his name called tried drearily to make sense of them.

But suddenly he opened his eyes. Somebody banged on the door once more. A voice cried angrily:

"Bron Hoddan! Wake up or I'll go away and let whatever happens to you happen! Wake up!"

It was the voice of the Lady Fani, at once indignant and tearful and solicitous and angry.

He rolled out of bed and found himself dressed. He hadn't slept the full night. At one time he couldn't rest for thinking about the sounds in the communicator when he listened at the spaceport. He listened again, and what he heard made him get his clothes on for action. That was when he heard a distinctly Waldenian voice, speaking communications speech with crisp distinctness, calling the landing-grid. The other voices were not Waldenian ones and he grew dizzy trying to figure them out. But he was clothed and ready to do

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whatever proved necessary when he realized that he had the landing-grid receiver, that there would be no reception even of the Waldenian call until the landing-grid crew had built another out of spare parts in store, and even then couldn't do much until they'd painfully sorted out and re-spliced all the tangled wires that Hoddan had cut. That had to be done before the grid could be used again.

He'd gone back to sleep while he tried to make sense of things. Now, long after daybreak, he shook himself and made sure a stun-pistol was handy. Then he said:

"Hello. I'm awake. What's up? Why all the noise?"

"Come out of there!" cried Fani's voice, simultaneously exasperated and filled with anxiety. "Things are happening! Somebody's here from Walden! They want you!"

Hoddan could not believe it. It was too unlikely. But he opened the door and Thal came in, and Fani followed.

"Good morning," said Hoddan automatically.

Thal said mournfully:

"A bad morning, Bron Hoddan! A bad morning! Men from Walden came riding over the hills—"

"How many?"

"Two," said Fani angrily. "A fat man in a uniform, and a young man who looks like he wants to cry. They had an escort of retainers from one of my father's neighbors. They were stopped at the gate, of course, and they sent a written message in to my father, and he had them brought inside right away!"

Hoddan shook his head.

"They probably said that I'm a criminal and that I should be sent back to Walden. How'd they get down? The landing-grid isn't working."

Fani said viciously;

"They landed in something that used rockets. It came down close to a castle over that way—only six or seven miles from the spaceport. They asked for you. They said you'd have landed from the last liner from Walden. And because you and Thal fought so splendidly—why, everybody's talking about you. So the chieftain over there accepted a present of money from them, and gave them horses as a return gift, and sent them here with a guard. Thal talked to the guards. The men from Walden have promised huge gifts of money if they help take you back to the thing that uses rockets."

"I suspect," said Hoddan, "that it would be a spaceboat—a lifeboat. Hm-m-m . . . Yes. With a built-in tool-steel cell to keep me from telling anybody how to make—" He stopped and grimaced. "If they had time to build one in, that's certain! They'd take me to the spaceport in a sound-proofed can and I'd be hauled back to Walden in it. Fine!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Fani anxiously.

Hoddan's ideas were not clear. But Darth was not a healthy place for him. It was extremely likely, for

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example, that Don Loris would feel that the very bad jolt he'd given that astute schemer's plans, by using stun-pistols at the spaceport, had been neatly canceled out by his rescue of Fani. He would regard Hoddan with a mingled gratitude and aversion that would amount to calm detachment. Don Loris could not be counted on as a really warm personal friend.

On the other hand, the social system of Darth was not favorable to a stranger with an already lurid reputation for fighting, but whose weapons would be useless unless frequently re-charged—and who couldn't count on that as a steady thing.

As a practical matter, his best bet was probably to investigate the nine inexplicable ships overhead. They hadn't co-operated with the Waldenians. It could be inferred that no confidential relationship existed up there. It was possible that the nine ships and the Waldenians didn't even know of each other's presence. There is a lot of room in space. If both called on ship-frequency and listened on ground-frequency, they would not have picked up each others' summons to the ground.

"You've got to do something!" insisted Fani. "I saw Father talking to them! He looked happy, and he never looks happy unless he's planning some skulduggery!"

"I think," said Hoddan, "that I'll have some breakfast, if I may. As soon as I fasten up my ship bag."

Thal said mournfully:

"If anything happens to you, something will happen to me too, because I helped you."

"Breakfast first," said Hoddan. "That, as I understand it, should make it disgraceful for your father to have my throat cut. But beyond that—" He said gloomily, "Thal, get a couple of horses outside the wall. We may need to ride somewhere. I'm very much afraid we will. But first I'd like to have some breakfast."

Fani said disappointedly:

"But aren't you going to face them? The men from Walden? You could shoot them!"

Hoddan shook his head.

"It wouldn't solve anything. Anyhow a practical man like your father won't sell me out before he's sure I can't pay off better. I'll bet on a conference with me before he makes a deal."

Fani stamped her foot.

"Outrageous! Think what you saved me from!"

But she did not question the possibility. Hoddan observed:

"A practical man can always make what he wants to do look like a noble sacrifice of personal inclinations to the welfare of the community. I've decided that I've got to be practical myself, and that's one of the rules. How about breakfast?"

He strapped the ship bag shut on the stun-pistols his pockets would not hold. He made a minor adjustment to the space communicator. It was not ruined, but nobody else could use it without much labor finding out what he'd done. This was the sort

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of thing his grandfather on Zan would have advised. His grandfather's views were explicit.

"Helping one's neighbor," he'd said frequently in Hoddan's hearing while Hoddan was a youth, "is all right as a two-way job. But maybe he's laying for you. You get a chance to fix him so he can't do you no harm and you're a lot better off and he's a hell of a lot better neighbor!"

This was definitely true of the men from Walden. Hoddan guessed that Derec was one of them. The other would represent the police or the planetary government. It was probably just as true of Don Loris and others.

Hoddan found himself disapproving of the way the cosmos was designed. Even though presently he sat at breakfast high up on the battlements, and Fani looked at him with interesting anxiety, he was filled with forebodings. The future looked dark. Yet what he asked of fate and chance was so simple! He asked only a career and riches and a delightful girl to marry and the admiration of his fellow-citizens. Trivial things! But it looked like he'd have to do battle for even such minor gifts of destiny!

Fani watched him breakfast.

"I don't understand you," she complained. "Anybody else would be proud of what he'd done and angry with my father. Or don't you think he'll act ungratefully?"

"Of course I do!" said Hoddan.

"Then why aren't you angry?"

"I'm hungry," said Hoddan.

"And you take it for granted that I want to be properly grateful," said Fani in one breath, "and yet you haven't shown the least appreciation of my getting two horses over in that patch of woodland yonder"—she pointed and Hoddan nodded—"and having Thal there with orders to serve you faithfully—"

She stopped short. Don Loris appeared, beaming, at the top of the steps leading here from the great hall where conferences took place. He regarded Hoddan benignly.

"This is a very bad business, my dear fellow," he said benevolently. "Has Fani told you of the people who arrived from Walden in search of you? They tell me terrible things about you!"

"Yes," said Hoddan. He prepared a roll for biting. He said: "One of them, I think, is named Derec. He's to identify me so good money isn't wasted paying for the wrong man. The other man's police, isn't he?" He reflected a moment. "If I were you, I'd start talking at a million credits. You might get half that."

He bit into the roll as Don Loris looked shocked.

"Do you think," he asked indignantly, "that I would give up the rescuer of my daughter to emmissaries from a foreign planet, to be locked in a dungeon for life?"

"Not in those words," conceded Hoddan. "But after all, despite your deep gratitude to me, there are such things as one's duty to humanity as a whole. And while it would cause

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you bitter anguish if someone dear to you represented a danger to millions of innocent women and children—still, under such circumstances you might feel it necessary to do violence to your own emotions."

Don Loris looked at him with abrupt suspicion. Hoddan waved the roll.

"Moreover," he observed, "gratitude for actions done on Darth does not entitle you to judge of my actions on Walden. While you might and even should feel obliged to defend me in all things I have done on Darth, your obligation to me does not let you deny that I may have acted less defensibly on Walden."

Don Loris looked extremely uneasy.

"I may have thought something like that," he admitted. "But—"

"So that," said Hoddan, "while your debt to me cannot and should not be overlooked, nevertheless"—Hoddan put the roll into his mouth and spoke less clearly—"you feel that you should give consideration to the claims of Walden to inquire into my actions while there."

He chewed, and swallowed, and said gravely:

"And can I make death rays?"

Don Loris brightened. He drew a deep breath of relief. He said complainingly:

"I don't see why you're so sarcastic! Yes. That is a rather important question. You see, on Walden they don't know how to. They say you do. They're very anxious that nobody should be able to. But while in unscrupulous hands such an instrument of destruction would be most unfortunate . . . ah . . . under proper control—"

"Yours," said Hoddan.

"Say—ours," said Don Loris hopefully. "With my experience of men and affairs, and my loyal and devoted retainers—"

"And cozy dungeons," said Hoddan. He wiped his mouth. "No."

Don Loris started violently.

"No, what?"

"No death rays," said Hoddan. "I can't make 'em. Nobody can. If they could be made, some star somewhere would be turning them out, or some natural phenomenon would let them loose from time to time. If there were such things as death rays, all living things would have died, or else would have adjusted to their weaker manifestations and developed immunity so they wouldn't be death rays any longer. As a matter of fact, that's probably been the case, some time in the past. So far as the gadget goes that they're talking about, it's been in use for half a century in the Cetis cluster. Nobody's died of it yet."

Don Loris looked bitterly disappointed.

"That's the truth?" he asked unhappily. "Honestly? That's your last word on it?"

"Much," said Hoddan, "much as I hate to spoil the prospects of profitable skulduggery, that's my last word and it's true."

"But those men from Walden are very anxious!" protested Don Loris.

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"There was no ship available, so their government got a liner that normally wouldn't stop here to take an extra lifeboat aboard. It came out of overdrive in this solar system, let out the lifeboat, and went on its way again. Those two men are extremely anxious—"

"Ambitious, maybe," said Hoddan. "They're prepared to pay to overcome your sense of gratitude to me. Naturally, you want all the traffic will bear. I think you can get half a million."

Don Loris looked suspicious again.

"You don't seem worried," he said fretfully. "I don't understand you!"

"I have a secret," said Hoddan.

"What is it?"

"It will develop," said Hoddan.

Don Loris hesitated, essayed to speak, and thought better of it. He shrugged his shoulders and went slowly back to the flight of stone steps. He descended. The Lady Fani started to wring her hands. Then she said hopefully:

"What's your secret?"

"That your father thinks I have one," said Hoddan. "Thanks for the breakfast. Should I walk out the gate, or—"

"It's closed," said the Lady Fani forlornly. "But I have a rope for you. You can go down over the wall."

"Thanks," said Hoddan. "It's been a pleasure to rescue you."

"Will you—" Fani hesitated. "I've never known anybody like you

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before. Will you ever come back?"

Hoddan shook his head at her.

"Once you asked me if I'd fight for you, and look what it got me into! No commitments."

He glanced along the battlements. There was a fairly large coil of rope in view. He picked up his bag and went over to it. He checked the fastening of one end and tumbled the other over the wall.

Ten minutes later he trudged up to Thal, waiting in the nearby woodland with two horses.

"The Lady Fani," he said, "has the kind of brains I like. She pulled up the rope again."

Thal did not comment. He watched morosely as Hoddan made the perpetually present ship bag fast to his saddle and then distastefully climbed aboard the horse.

"What are you going to do?" asked Thal unhappily. "I didn't make a parting-present to Don Loris, so I'll be disgraced if he finds out I helped you. And I don't know where to take you."

"Where," asked Hoddan, "did those characters from Walden come down?"

Thal told him. At the castle of a considerable feudal chieftain, on the plain some four miles from the mountain range and six miles this side of the spaceport.

"We ride there," said Hoddan. "Liberty is said to be sweet, but the man who said that didn't have blisters from a saddle. Let's go."

They rode away. There would be no immediate pursuit, and possibly none at all. Don Loris had left Hoddan at breakfast on the battlements. The Lady Fani would make as much confusion over his disappearance as she could. But there'd be no search for him until Don Loris had made his deal.

Hoddan was sure that Fani's father would have an enjoyable morning. He would relish the bargaining session. He'd explain in great detail how valuable had been Hoddan's service to him, in rescuing Fani from an abductor who would have been an intolerable son-in-law. He'd grow almost tearful as he described his affection for Hoddan—how he loved his daughter—as he observed grievedly that they were asking him to betray the man who had saved for him the solace of his old age. He would mention also that the price they offered was an affront to his paternal affection and his dignity as prince of this, baron of that, lord of the other thing and claimant to the dukedom of something-or-other. Either they'd come up or the deal was off!

But meanwhile Hoddan and Thal rode industriously toward the place from which those emissaries had come.

All was tranquil. All was calm. Once they saw a dust cloud, and Thal turned aside to a providential wooded copse, in which they remained while a cavalcade went by. Thal explained that it was a feudal chieftain on his way to the spaceport town. It was simple discretion for them not to be observed, said Thal, because they

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had great reputations as fighting men. Whoever defeated them would become prominent at once. So somebody might try to pick a quarrel under one of the finer points of etiquette when it would be disgrace to use anything but standard Darthian implements for massacre. Hoddan admitted that he did not feel quarrelsome.

They rode on after a time, and in late afternoon the towers and battlements of the castle they sought appeared. The ground here was only gently rolling. They approached it with caution, following the reverse slope of hills, and dry stream-beds, and at last penetrating horse-high brush to the point where they could see it clearly.

If Hoddan had been a student of early terrestrial history, he might have remarked upon the re-emergence of ancient architectural forms to match the revival of primitive social systems. As it was, he noted in this feudal castle the use of bastions for flanking fire upon attackers, he recognized the value of battlements for the protection of defenders while allowing them to shoot, and the tricky positioning of sally ports. He even grasped the reason for the massive, stark, unornamented keep. But his eyes did not stay on the castle for long. He saw the spaceboat in which Derec and his more authoritative companion had arrived.

It lay on the ground a half mile from the castle walls. It was a clumsy, obese, flattened shape some forty feet long and nearly fifteen wide. The ground about it was scorched where it had descended upon its rocket flames. There were several horses tethered near it, and men who were plainly retainers of the nearby castle reposed in its shade.

Hoddan reined in.

"Here we part," he told Thal. "When we first met I enabled you to pick the pockets of a good many of your fellow-countrymen. I never asked for my split of the take. I expect you to remember me with affection."

Thal clasped both of Hoddan's hands in his.

"If you ever return," he said with mournful warmth, "I am your friend!"

Hoddan nodded and rode out of the brushwood toward the spaceboat —the lifeboat—that had landed the emissaries from Walden. That it landed so close to the spaceport, of course, was no accident. It was known on Walden that Hoddan had taken space passage to Darth. He'd have landed only two days before his pursuers could reach the planet. And on a roadless, primitive world like Darth he couldn't have gotten far from the spaceport. So his pursuers would have landed close by, also. But it must have taken considerable courage. When the landing-grid failed to answer, it must have seemed likely that Hoddan's death rays had been at work.

Here and now, though, there was no uneasiness. Hoddan rode heavily, without haste, through the slanting

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sunshine. He was seen from a distance and watched without apprehension by the loafing guards about the boat. He looked hot and thirsty. He was both. So the posted guard merely looked at him without too much interest when he brought his dusty mount up to the shadow the lifeboat cast, and apparently decided that there wasn't room to get into it.

He grunted a greeting and looked at them speculatively.

"Those two characters from Walden," he observed, "sent me to get something from this thing, here. Don Loris told 'em I was a very honest man."

He painstakingly looked like a very honest man. After a moment there were responsive grins.

"If there's anything missing when I start back," said Hoddan, "I can't imagine how it happened! None of you would take anything. Oh, no! I bet you'll blame it on me!" He shook his head and said *"Tsk. Tsk. Tsk."*

One of the guards sat up and said appreciatively:

"But it's locked. Good."

"Being an honest man," said Hoddan amiably, "they told me how to unlock it."

He got off his horse. He removed the bag from his saddle. He went into the grateful shadow of the metal hull. He paused and mopped his face and then went to the entrance port. He put his hand on the turning bar. Then he painstakingly pushed in the locking-stud with his other hand. Of course the handle turned. The boat port opened. The two from Walden would have thought everything safe because it was under guard. On Walden that protection would have been enough. On Darth, the spaceboat had not been looted simply because locks, there, were not made with separate vibration-checks to keep vibration from loosening them. On spaceboats such a precaution was usual.

"Give me two minutes," said Hoddan over his shoulder. "I have to get what they sent me for. After that everybody starts even."

He entered and closed the door behind him. Then he locked it. By the nature of things it is as needful to be able to lock a spaceboat from the inside as it is unnecessary to lock it from without.

He looked things over. Standard equipment everywhere. He checked everything, even to the fuel supply. There were knockings on the port. He continued to inspect. He turned on the visionscreens, which provided the control room—indeed, all the boat—with an unobstructed view in all directions. He was satisfied.

The knocks became bangings. Something approaching indignation could be deduced. The guards around the spaceboat felt that Hoddan was taking an unfair amount of time to pick the cream of the loot inside.

He got a glass of water. It was excellent. A second.

The bangings became violent hammerings.

Hoddan seated himself leisurely in the pilot's seat and turned small

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knobs. He waited. He touched a button. There was a mildly thunderous bang outside, and the lifeboat reacted as if to a slight shock. The vision-screens showed a cloud of dust at the spaceboat's stern, roused by a deliberate explosion in the rocket tubes. It also showed the retainers in full flight.

He waited until they were in safety and made the standard take-off preparations. A horrific roaring started up outside. He touched controls and a monstrous weight pushed him back in his seat. The rocket swung, and lifted, and shot skyward with greater acceleration than before.

It went up at a lifeboat's full fall-like rate of climb, leaving a trail of blue-white flame behind it. All the surface of Darth seemed to contract swiftly below him. The spaceport and the town rushed toward a spot beneath the spaceboat's tail. They shrank and shrank. He saw other places. Mountains. Castles. He saw Don Loris' stronghold. Higher, he saw the sea.

The sky turned purple. It went black with specks of starshine in it. Hoddan swung to a westward course and continued to rise, watching the star-images as they shifted on the screens. The image of the sun, of course, was automatically diminished so that it was not dazzling. The rockets continued to roar, though in a minor fashion because there was no longer air outside in which a bellow could develop.

Hoddan painstakingly made use of those rule-of-thumb methods of astrogation which his piratical forebears had developed and which a boy on Zan absorbed without being aware. He wanted an orbit around Darth. He didn't want to take time to try to compute it. So he watched the star-images ahead and astern. If the stars ahead rose above the planet's edge faster than those behind sank down below it—he would be climbing. If the stars behind sank down faster than those ahead rose up—he would be descending. If all the stars rose equally he'd be climbing straight up, and if they all dropped equally he'd be moving straight down. It was not a complex method, and it worked.

Presently he relaxed. He sped swiftly back past midday and toward the sunrise line on Darth. This was the reverse of a normal orbit, but it was the direction followed by the ships up here. He hoped his orbit was lower than theirs. If it was, he'd overtake them from behind. If he were higher, they'd overtake him.

He turned on the space phone. Its reception-indicator was piously placed at "Ground." He shifted it to "Space," so that it would pick up calls going planetward, instead of listening vainly for replies from the nonoperative landing-grid.

Instantly voices boomed in his ears. Many voices. An impossibly large number of voices. Many, many, many more than nine transmitters were in operation now!

"Idiot!" said a voice in quiet passion, *"sheer off or you'll get in our*

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drive-field!" A high-pitched voice said; *". . . And group two take second-orbit position—"* Somebody bellowed: *"But why don't they answer?"* And another voice still said formally: *"Reporting group five, but four ships are staying behind with tanker* Toya, *which is having stabilizer-trouble. . . ."*

Hoddan's eyes opened very wide. He turned down the sound while he tried to think. But there wasn't anything to think. He'd come aloft to scout three ships that had turned to nine, because he was in such a fix on Darth that anything strange might be changed into something useful. But this was more than nine ships—itself an impossibly large space fleet. There was no reason why ships of space should ever travel together. There were innumerable reasons why they shouldn't. There was a limit to the number of ships that could be accommodated at any spaceport in the galaxy. There was no point, no profit, no purpose in a number of ships traveling together—

Darth's sunrise-line appeared far ahead. The lifeboat would soon cease to be a bright light in the sky, now. The sun's image vanished from the rear screens. The boat went hurtling onward through the blackness of the planet's shadow while voices squabbled, and wrangled, and formally reported, and now and again one admonished disputants to a proper discipline of language.

During the period of darkness, Hoddan racked his brains for the vaguest of ideas on why so many ships should appear about an obscure and unimportant world like Darth. Presently the sunset line appeared ahead, and far away he saw moving lights which were the hulls of the volubly communicating vessels. He stared, blankly. There were tens—Scores— He was forced to guess at the stark impossibility of more than a hundred spacecraft in view. As the boat rushed onward he had to raise the guess. It couldn't be, but—

He turned on the outside telescope, and the image on its screen was more incredible than the voices and the existence of the fleet itself. The scope focused first on a bulging, monster, antiquated freighter of a design that had not been built for a hundred years. The second view was of a passenger liner with the elaborate ornamentation that in past generations was considered suitable for space. There was a bulk-cargo ship, with no emergency rockets at all and crews' quarters in long blisters built outside the gigantic tank which was the ship itself. There was a needle-sharp space yacht. More freighters, with streaks of rust on their sides where they had lain aground for tens of years . . .

The fleet was an anomaly, and each of its component parts was separately a freak. It was a gathering-together of all the outmoded and obsolete hulks and monstrosities of space. One would have to scavenge half the galaxy to bring together so many crazy, over-age derelicts that should have been in junk yards.

Then Hoddan drew an explosive

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deep breath. It was suddenly clear what the fleet was and what its reason must be. Why it stopped here could not yet be guessed, but—

Hoddan watched absorbedly. He couldn't know what was toward, but there was some emergency. It could be in the line of what an electronic engineer could handle. If so—why—it could mean an opportunity to accomplish great things, and grow rich, and probably marry some delightful girl and be a great man somewhere—an assortment of ambitions one could not easily gratify on Zan, or Walden, or Darth.

VII

The spaceboat floated on upon a collision-course with the arriving fleet. That would not mean, of course, actual contact with any of the improbable vessels themselves. Crowded as the sunlit specks might seem from Darth's night-side shadow, they were sufficiently separated. It was more than likely that even with ten-mile intervals the ships would be considered much too crowded. But they came pouring out of emptiness to go into a swirling, plainly pre-intended orbit about the planet from which Hoddan had risen less than an hour before.

There was inevitable confusion, though, and the spacephone proved it. There were disputes between freakish ships when craft with the astrogational qualities of washtubs tried to keep assigned positions, and failed, and there were squabbles when ships had to pass close together. One had to shut off its drive-field to keep from blowing the fuses of both.

But there were some ships which proceeded quietly to their positions and others which did the same after tumult amounting to rebellion. And naturally there were a few others which seemed incapable of co-operation with anybody. They went careening through the other ships' paths in what must have seemed to the planet's sunset area like a most unlikely dancing of brand-new stars.

It was a gigantic traffic tangle, and Hoddan's boat drifted toward and into it. He'd counted a hundred ships long before. His count now passed two hundred and continued. Before he gave up he'd numbered two hundred forty-seven space-oddities swarming to make a whirling band—a ring—around the planet Darth.

He was fairly sure that he knew what they were, now. But he could not possibly guess where they came from. And most mysterious of all was the question of why they'd come out of faster-than-light drive to make of themselves a celestial feature about a planet which had practically nothing to offer to anybody.

Presently the spaceboat was in the very thick of the fleet. His communicator spouted voices whose tones ranged from basso profundo to high tenor, and whose ideas of proper astrogation seemed to vary more widely still.

"*You there!*" boomed a voice with

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deafening volume. *"You're in our clear-space! Sheer off!"*

The volume of a signal in space varies as the square of the distance. This voice was thunderous. It came apparently from a nearby, pot-bellied tripper ship of really ancient vintage. Rows of ports in its sides had been welded over. It had rocket tubes whose size was indicative of the kind of long-obsolete fuel on which it once had operated. Slenderer nozzles peered out of the original ones now. It had been adapted to modern propellants by simply welding modern rockets inside the old ones. It was only half a mile away.

Hoddan's spaceboat floated on. The relative position of the two ships changed slowly. Another voice said indignantly:

"That's the same thing that missed us by less than a mile! You, there! Stop acting like a squig! Get on your own course!"

A third voice;

"What boat's that? I don't recognize it! I thought I knew all the freaks in this fleet, too!"

A fourth voice said sharply:

"That's not one of us! Look at the design! That's not us!"

Other voices broke in. There was babbling. Then a harsh voice roared: *"Quiet! I order it!"* There was silence. The harsh voice said heavily, *"Relay the image to me."* There was a pause. The same voice said grimly: *"It is not of our fleet. You, stranger! Identify yourself! Who are you and why do you slip secretly among us?"*

Hoddan pushed the transmit button.

"My name is Bron Hoddan," he said. "I came up to find out why three ships, and then nine ships, went into orbit around Darth. It was somewhat alarming. Our landing-grid's disabled, anyhow, and it seemed wisest to look you over before we communicated and possibly told you something you might not believe. But you surely don't expect to land all this fleet! Actually, we can't land any."

The harsh voice said as grimly as before:

"You come from the planet below us? Darth? Why is your ship so small? The smallest of ours is greater."

"This is a lifeboat," said Hoddan pleasantly. "It's supposed to be carried on larger ships in case of emergency."

"If you will come to our leading ship," said the voice, *"we will answer all your questions. I will have a smoke flare set off to guide you."*

Hoddan said to himself:

"No threats and no offers. I can guess why there are no threats. But they should offer something!"

He waited. There was a sudden huge eruption of vapor in space some two hundred miles away. Perhaps an ounce of explosive had been introduced into a rocket tube and fired. The smoke particles, naturally ionized, added their self-repulsion to the expansiveness of the explosive's gases. A cauliflowerlike shape of

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filmy whiteness appeared and grew larger and thinner.

Hoddan drove toward the spot with very light touches of rocket power. He swung the boat around and killed its relative velocity. The leading ship was a sort of gigantic, shapeless, utterly preposterous ark-like thing. Hoddan could neither imagine a purpose for which it could have been used, nor a time when men would have built anything like it. Its huge sides seemed to be made exclusively of great doorways now tightly closed.

One of those doorways suddenly gaped wide. It would have admitted a good-sized modern ship. A nervous voice essayed to give Hoddan directions for getting the spaceboat inside what was plainly an enormous hold now pumped empty of air. He grunted and made the attempt. It was tricky. He sweated when he cut off his power. But he felt fairly safe. Rocket flames would burn down such a door, if necessary. He could work havoc if hostilities began.

The great cargo door swung shut. The outside-pressure needle swung sharply and stopped at thirty centimeters of mercury pressure. There was a clanging. A smaller door evidently opened somewhere. Lights came on—old-fashioned glow tubes. Then figures appeared through a door leading to some other part of this ship.

Hoddan nodded to himself. The costume was odd. It was awkward. It was even primitive, but not in the fashion of the soiled but gaudily colored garments of Darth. These men wore unrelieved black, with gray shirts. There was no touch of color about them. Even the younger ones wore beards. And of all unnecessary things, they wore flat-brimmed hats—*in a spaceship!*

Hoddan opened the boat door and said politely:

"Good morning. I'm Bron Hoddan. You were talking to me just now."

The oldest and most fiercely bearded of the men said harshly:

"I am the leader here. We are the people of Colin." He frowned when Hoddan's expression remained unchanged. "The people of Colin!" he repeated more loudly. "The people whose forefathers settled that planet, and brought it to be a world of peace and plenty—and then foolishly welcomed strangers to their midst!"

"Too bad," said Hoddan. He knew what these people were doing, he believed, but putting a name to where they'd come from told him nothing of what they wanted of Darth.

"We made it a fair world," said the bearded man fiercely. "But it was my great-grandfather who destroyed it. He believed that we should share it. It was he who persuaded the Synod to allow strangers to settle among us, believing that they would become like us."

Hoddan nodded expectantly. These people were in some sort of trouble or they wouldn't have come out of overdrive. But they'd talked

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about it until it had become an emotionalized obsession that couldn't be summarized. When they encountered a stranger, they had to picture their predicament passionately and at length.

This bearded man looked at Hoddan with burning eyes. When he went on, it was with gestures as if he were making a speech, but it was a special sort of speech. The first sentence told what kind.

"They clung to their sins!" said the bearded man bitterly. "They did not adopt our ways! Our example went for naught! They brought others of their kind to Colin. After a little they laughed at us. In a little more they outnumbered us! Then they ruled that the laws of our Synod should not govern them. And they lured our young people to imitate them—frivolous, sinful, riotous folk that they were!"

Hoddan nodded again. There were elderly people on Zan who talked like this. Not his grandfather! If you listened long enough they'd come to some point or other, but they had arranged their thoughts so solidly that any attempt to get quickly at their meaning would only produce confusion.

"Twenty years since," said the bearded man with an angry gesture, "we made a bargain. We held a third of all the land of the planet, but our young men were falling away from the ways of their fathers. We made a bargain with the newcomers we had cherished. We would trade our lands, our cities, our farms, our highways, for ships to take us to a new world with food for the journey and machines for the taming of the planet we would select. We sent of our number to find a world to which we could move. Ten years back, they returned. They had found it. The planet Thetis."

Again Hoddan had no reaction. The name meant nothing.

"We began to prepare," said the old man, his eyes flashing. "Five years since, we were ready. But we had to wait three more before the bargainers were ready to complete the trade. They had to buy and collect the ships. They had to design and build the machinery we would need. They had to collect the food supplies. Two years ago we moved our animals into the ships, and loaded our food and our furnishings, and took our places. We set out. For two years we have journeyed toward Thetis."

Hoddan felt an instinctive respect for people who would undertake to move themselves, the third of the population of a planet, over a distance that meant years of voyaging. They might have tastes in costume that he did not share, and they might go in for elaborate oratory instead of matter-of-fact statements, but they had courage.

"Yes, sir," said Hoddan. "I take it this brings us up to the present."

"No," said the old man, his eyes flashing. "Six months ago we considered that we might well begin to train the operators of the machines we would use on Thetis. We un-

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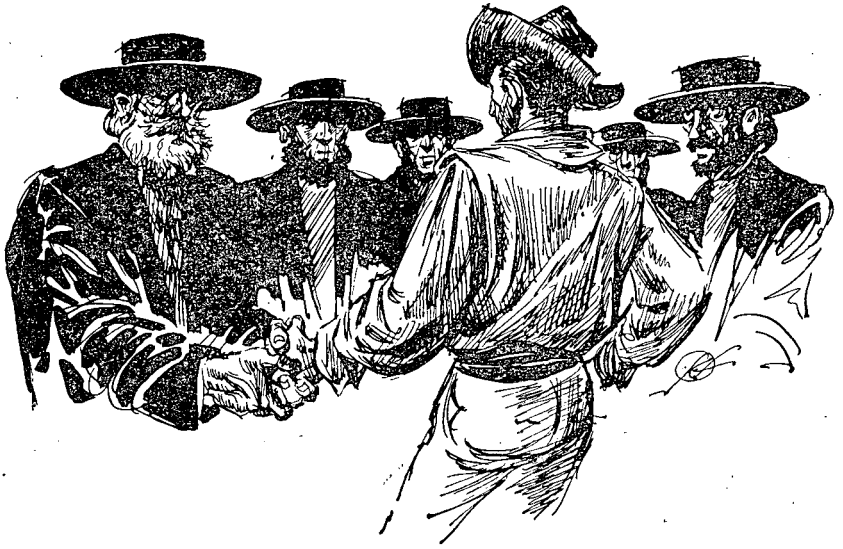

crated machines. We found ourselves cheated!"

Hoddan found that he could make a fairly dispassionate guess of what advantage — say — Nedda's father would take of people who would not check on his good faith for two years and until they were two years' journey away. The business men on Krim would have some sort of code determining how completely one could swindle a customer. Don Loris, now—

"How badly were you cheated?" asked Hoddan.

"Of our lives!" said the angry old man. "Do you know machinery?"

"Some kinds," admitted Hoddan.

"Come," said the leader of the fleet.

With a sort of dignity that was theatrical only because he was aware of it, the leader of the people of Colin showed the way. Hoddan had been admitted with his spaceboat into one gigantic cargo hold. He was now escorted to the next. It was packed tightly with cases of machinery. One huge crate had been opened and its contents fully disclosed. Others had been hacked at enough to show their contents.

The uncrated machine was a jungle plow. It was a powerful piece of equipment which would attack jungle on a thirty-foot front, knock down all vegetation up to trees of four-foot diameter, shred it, loosen and sift the soil to a three-foot depth, and leave behind it smoothed, broken, pulverized dirt mixed with ground-up vegetation ready to break down into humus. Such a machine would clear tens of acres in a day and night,

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turning jungle into farmland ready for terrestrial crops.

"We ran this for five minutes," said the bearded man fiercely as Hoddan nodded approval. He lifted a motor hood.

The motors were burned out. Worthless insulation. Gears were splintered and smashed. Low-grade metal castings. Assembly bolts had parted. Tractor treads were bent and cracked. It was not a machine except in shape. It was a mock-up in worthless materials which probably cost its maker the twentieth part of what an honest jungle plow would cost to build.

Hoddan felt the anger any man feels when he sees betrayal of that honor a competent machine represents.

"It's not all like this!" he said incredulously.

"Some is worse," said the old man, with dignity. "There are crates which are marked to contain turbines. Their contents are ancient, worn-out brick-making machines. There are crates marked to contain generators. They are filled with corroded irrigation pipe and broken castings. We have shiploads of crush-baled, rusted sheet-metal trimmings! We have been cheated of our lives!"

Hoddan found himself sick with honest fury. The population of one-third of a planet, packed into spaceships for two years and more, would be appropriate subjects for sympathy at the best of times. But it was only accident that had kept these people from landing on Thetis by rocket—since none of their ships would be expected ever to rise again—and from having their men go out and joyfully hack at an alien jungle to make room for their machines to land—and then find out they'd brought scrap metal for some thousands of light-years to no purpose.

They'd have starved outright. In fact, they were in not much better case right now. Because there was nowhere else that they could go! There was no new colony which could absorb so many people, with only their bare hands for equipment to live by. There was no civilized, settled world which could admit so many paupers without starving its own population. There was nowhere for these people to go!

Hoddan's anger took on the feeling of guilt. He could do nothing, and something had to be done.

"Why . . . why did you come to Darth?" he asked. "What can you gain by orbiting here? You can't expect—"

The old man faced him.

"We are beggars," he said with bitter dignity. "We stopped here to ask for charity—for the old and worn-out machines the people of Darth can spare us. We will be grateful for even a single rusty plow. Because we have to go on. We can do nothing else. We will land on Thetis. And one plow can mean that a few of us will live who otherwise would die with . . . with the most of us."

Hoddan ran his hands through his hair. This was not his trouble,

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but he could not thrust it from him.

"But again—why Darth?" he asked helplessly. "Why not stop at a world with riches to spare? Darth's a poor place—"

"Because it is the poor who are generous," said the bearded man evenly. "The rich might give us what they could spare. But simple, not-rich people, close to the soil, will give us what they need themselves. They will share what they have, and accept a share of our need."

Hoddan paced up and down the ancient flooring of this compartment in an ancient ship. Presently he said jerkily:

"With all the good will in the world . . . Darth is poverty-stricken. It has no industries. It has no technology. It has not even roads! It is a planet of little villages and tiny towns. A ship from elsewhere stops here only once a month. Ground communications are almost nonexistent. To spread the word of your need over Darth would require months. But to collect what might be given, without roads or even wheeled vehicles— No. It's impossible! And I have the only space vessel on the planet, and it's not fit for a journey between suns."

The bearded man waited with a sort of implacable despair.

"But," said Hoddan grimly, "I have an idea. I . . . ah . . . have contacts on Walden. The government of Walden does not regard charity with favor. The need for charity seems a . . . ah . . . a criticism of the Waldenian standard of living."

The bearded man said coldly:

"I can understand that. The hearts of the rich are hardened. The existence of the poor is a reproach to them."

But Hoddan began suddenly to see real possibilities. This was not a direct move toward the realization of his personal ambitions. But on the other hand, it wasn't a movement away from them. Hoddan suddenly remembered an oration he'd heard his grandfather give many, many times in the past.

"Straight thinkin'," the old man had said obstinately, "is a delusion. You think things out clear and simple, and you can see yourself ruined and your family starving any day! But real things ain't simple! They ain't clear! Any time you try to figure things out so they're simple and straightforward, you're goin' against nature and you're going to get 'em mixed up! So when something happens and you're in a straightforward, hopeless fix—why, you go along with nature! Make it as complicated as you can, and the people who want you in trouble will get hopeless confused and you can get out!"

Hoddan adverted to his grandfather's wisdom—not making it the reason for doing what he could, but accepting that it not impossibly might apply. He saw one possibility right away. It looked fairly good. After a minute's examination it looked better. It was astonishing how plausible—

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"Hm-m-m," he said. "I have planned work of my own, as you may have guessed. I am here because of . . . ah . . . people on Walden. If I could make a quick trip to Walden my . . . hm-m-m . . . present position might let me help you. I cannot promise very much, but if I can borrow even the smallest of your ships for the journey my spaceboat can't make . . . why . . . I may be able to do something. Much more than can be done on Darth!"

The bearded man looked at his companions.

"He seems frank," he said forbiddingly, "and we can lose nothing. We have stopped our journey and are in orbit. We can wait. But . . . our people should not go to Walden. Fleshpots—"

"I can find a crew," said Hoddan cheerfully. Inwardly he was tremendously relieved. "If you say the word, I'll go down to ground and come back with them. Er . . . I'll want a very small ship!"

"It will be," said the old man. "We thank you—"

"Get it inboard, here," suggested Hoddan, "so I can come inside as before, transfer my crew without spacesuits, and leave my boat in your care until I come back."

"It shall be done," said the old man firmly. He added gravely: "You must have had an excellent upbringing, young man, to be willing to live among the poverty-stricken people you describe, and to be willing to go so far to help strangers like ourselves."

"Eh?" Then Hoddan said enigmatically, "What lessons I shall apply to your affairs, I learned at the knee of my beloved grandfather."

Of course, his grandfather was head of the most notorious gang of pirates on the disreputable planet Zan, but Hoddan found himself increasingly respecting the old gentleman as he gained experience of various worlds.

He went briskly back to his spaceboat. On the way he made verbal arrangements for the enterprise he'd envisioned so swiftly. It was remarkable how two sets of troubles could provide suggestions for their joint alleviation. He actually saw possible achievement before him. Even in electronics!

By the time the cargo space was again pumped empty and the great door opened to the vastness of space, Hoddan had a very broad view of things. He'd said that same day to Fani that a practical man can always make what he wants to do look like a sacrifice of his personal inclinations to others' welfare. He began to suspect, now, that the welfare of others can often coincide with one's own.

He needed some rather extensive changes in the relationship of the cosmos to himself. Walden was prepared to pay bribes for him. Don Loris felt it necessary to have him confined somewhere. There were a number of Darthian gentlemen who would assuredly like to slaughter him if he wasn't kept out of their reach in some cozy dungeon. But up to now

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there had been not even a practical way to leave Darth, to act upon Walden, or even to change his status in the eyes of Darthians.

He backed out of the big ship and consulted the charts of the lifeboat. They had been consulted before, of course, to locate the landing-grid which did not answer calls. He found its position. He began to compare the chart with what he saw from out here in orbit above Darth. He identified a small ocean, with Darth's highest mountain chain just beyond its eastern limit. He identified a river-system, emptying into that sea. And here he began to get rid of his excess velocity, because the landing-grid was not very far distant—some fifteen hundred or two thousand miles.

To a scientific pilot, his maneuvering from that time on would have been a complex task. The advantage of computation over astrogation by ear, however, is largely a matter of saving fuel. A perfectly computed course for landing will get down to ground with the use of the least number of centigrams of fuel possible. But fuel-efficient maneuvers are rarely time-efficient ones.

Hoddan hadn't the time or the data for computation. He swung the spaceboat end for end, very judgmatically used rocket power to slow himself to a suitable east-west velocity, and at the last and proper instant applied full-power for deceleration and went down practically like a stone. One cannot really learn this. It has to be absorbed through the pores of one's skin. That was the way Hoddan had absorbed it, on Zan.

Within minutes, then, the stronghold of Don Loris was startled by a roaring mutter in the sky high overhead. Helmeted sentries on the battlements stared upward. The mutter rose to a howl, and the howl to the volume of thunder, and the thunder to a very great noise which made loose pebbles dance and quiver.

Then there was a speck of white cloudiness in the late afternoon sky. It grew swiftly in size, and a winking blue-white light appeared in its center. That light grew brighter—and the noise managed somehow to increase—and presently the ruddy sunlight was diluted by light from the rockets with considerably more blue in it. Secondary, pallid shadows appeared.

Then, abruptly, the rockets cut off, and something dark plunged downward, and the rockets flamed again and a vast mass of steam arose from scorched ground—and the spaceboat lay in a circle of wildly smoking, carbonized Darthian soil. The return of tranquility after so much of tumult was startling.

Absolutely nothing happened. Hoddan unstrapped himself from the pilot's seat, examined his surroundings thoughtfully, and turned off the vision apparatus. He went back and examined the feeding arrangements of the boat. He'd had nothing to eat since breakfast in this same time-zone. The food in store was extreme-

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ly easy to prepare and not especially appetizing. He ate with great deliberation, continuing to make plans which linked the necessities of the emigrants from Colin to his relationship to the government of Walden, the brief visit he'd made to Krim, the ship the emigrants would lend him and his unpopularity with Don Loris on Darth. He also thought very respectfully about his grandfather's opinions on many subjects, including space-piracy. Hoddan found himself much more in agreement with his grandfather than he'd believed possible.

Outside the boat, birds which had dived to ground and cowered there during the boat's descent now flew about again, their terror forgotten. Horses which had galloped wildly in their pastures, or kicked in panic in the castle stalls, returned to their oats and hay.

And there were human reactions. Don Loris had been in an excessively fretful state of mind since the conclusion of his deal with the pair from Walden. Hoddan had estimated that he ought to get a half-million credits for Hoddan delivered to Derec and the Waldenian police. He'd been unable to get the police official—Derec merely sat miserably by and said nothing—to promise more than half so much. But he'd closed the deal and sent for Hoddan —and Hoddan was gone.

Now the landing of this spaceboat roused a lively uneasiness in Don Loris. It might be new bargainers for Hoddan. It might be anything. Hoddan had said he had a secret. This might be it. Don Loris vexedly tried to contrive some useful skulduggery without the information to base it on.

Fani looked at the spaceboat with bright eyes. Thal was back at the castle. He'd told her of Hoddan riding up to the spaceboat near another chieftain's castle, entering it, and that then it had taken to the skies in an aura of flames and smoke and thunder. Fani hoped that he might have returned here in it. But she worried while she waited for him to do something.

Hoddan did nothing. The spaceboat gave no sign of life.

The sun set, and the sky twinkled with darting lights which flew toward the west and vanished. Twilight followed, and more lights flashed across the heavens as if pursuing the sun. Fani had learned to associate three and then nine such lights with spacecraft, but she could not dream of a fleet of hundreds. She dismissed the lights from her mind, being much more concerned with Hoddan. He would be in as bad a fix as ever if he came out of the boat.

Twilight remained, a fairy half-light in which all things looked much more charming than they really were. And Don Loris, reduced to peevish sputtering by pure mystery, summoned Thal to him. It should be remembered that Don Loris knew nothing of the disappearance of the spaceboat from his neighbor's land. He knew nothing

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of Thal's journey with Hoddan. But he did remember that Hoddan had seemed unworried at breakfast and explained his calm by saying that he had a secret. The feudal chieftain worried lest this spaceboat be it.

"Thal," said Don Loris peevishly, sitting beside the great fireplace in the enormous, draughty hall, "you know this Bron Hoddan better than anybody else."

Thal breathed heavily. He turned pale.

"Where is he?" demanded Don Loris.

"I don't know," said Thal. It was true. So far as he was concerned, Hoddan had vanished into the sky.

"What does he plan to do?" demanded Don Loris.

"I don't know," said Thal helplessly.

"Where does that . . . that thing outside the castle come from?"

"I don't know," said Thal.

Don Loris drummed on the arm of his intricately carved chair.

"I don't like people who don't know things!" he said fretfully. "There must be somebody in that—thing. Why don't they show themselves? What are they here for? Why did they come down—especially here? Because of Bron Hoddan?"

"I don't know," said Thal humbly.

"Then go find out!" snapped Don Loris. "Take a reasonable guard with you. The thing must have a door. Knock on it and ask who's inside and why they came here. Tell them I sent you to ask."

Thal saluted. With his teeth tending to chatter, he gathered a half-dozen of his fellows and went tramping out the castle gate. Some of the half dozen had been involved in the rescue of the Lady Fani from Ghek. They were still in a happy mood because of the plunder they'd brought back. It was much more than a mere retainer could usually hope for in a year.

"What's this all about, Thal?" demanded one of them as Thal arranged them in two lines to make a proper military appearance, spears dressed upright and garrison-shields on their left arms.

"Frrrrd *harch!*" barked Thal, and they swung into motion. "Two, three, four, *Hup,* two, three, four. *Hup,* two, three—" The cadence was established.

Thal said gloomily, "Don Loris said to find out who landed that thing out yonder. And he keeps asking me about Bron Hoddan, too."

He strode in step with the others. The seven men made an impressively soldierly group, tramping away from the castle wall.

"What happened to him?" asked a rear-file man. He marched on, eyes front, chest out, spear-shaft swinging splendidly in time with his marching. "That lad has a nose for loot! Don't take it himself, though. If he set up in business as a chieftain, now—"

"*Hup,* two, three, four," muttered Thal. "*Hup,* two, three—"

"Don Loris' a hard chieftain,"

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growled the right-hand man in the second file. "Plenty of grub and beer, but no fighting and no loot. I didn't get to go with you characters the other day, but what you brought back—"

"Wasn't half of what was there," mourned a front-file man. "Wasn't half! Those pistols he issued got shot out and we had to get outta there fast! . . . Hm-m-m . . . Here's this thing, Thal. What do we do with it?"

"Hrrrmp, *halt!*" barked Thal. He stared at the motionless, seemingly lifeless, shapeless spaceboat. He'd seen one like it earlier today. That one spouted fire and went up out of sight. He was wary of this one. He grumbled: "Those pipes in the back of it—steer clear of 'em. They spit fire. No door on this side. Don Loris said knock on the door. We go around the front. Frrrrd *harch!* two, three, four, *hup,* two, three, four. Left turn here and mind those rocks. Don Loris'd give us hell if somebody fell down. Left turn again, *Hup,* two, three, four—"

The seven men tramped splendidly around the front of the lifeboat. On the far side, its bulk hid even Don Loris' castle from view. The six spearmen, with Thal, came to a second halt.

"Here goes," rumbled Thal. "I tell you, boys, if she starts to spit fire, you get the hell away!"

He marched up to the spaceboat's port. He knocked on it. There was no response. He knocked again.

Hoddan opened the door. He nodded cheerfully to Thal.

"'Afternoon, Thal! Glad to see you. I've been hoping you'd come over this way. Who's with you?" He peered through the semidarkness. "Some of the boys, eh? Come in!" He beckoned and said casually: "Lean your spears against the hull, there."

Thal hesitated and was lost. The others obeyed. There were clatterings as the steel spearheads came to rest against the metal hull. Six of Don Loris' retainers followed Thal admiringly into the spaceboat's interior, to gaze at it and that Bron Hoddan who so recently had given three of them and nearly half a score of their fellows the chance to loot a nearby castle.

"Sit down!" said Hoddan cordially. "If you want to feel what a spaceboat's really like, clasp the seat belts around you. You'll feel exactly like you're about to make a journey out of atmosphere. That's it. Lean back. You notice there are no viewports in the hull? That's because we use these visionscreens to see around with."

He flicked on the screens. Thal and his companions were charmed to see the landscape outside portrayed on screens. Hoddan shifted the sensitivity-point toward infra red, and details came out that would have been invisible to the naked eye.

"With the boatport closed," said Hoddan, "like this—" The port clanged shut and grumbled for half a second as the locking-dogs went

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home. "We're all set for take-off. I need only get into the pilot's seat"—he did so, "and throw on the fuel pump—" A tiny humming sounded. "And we move when I advance this throttle!"

He pressed the firing-stud. There was a soul-shaking roar. There was a terrific pressure. The seven men from Don Loris' stronghold were pressed back in their seats with an overwhelming, irresistible pressure which held them absolutely helpless. Their mouths dropped open. Appalled protests tried to come out, but were pushed back by the seemingly ever-increasing acceleration.

The screens, showing the outside, displayed a great and confused tumult of smoke and fumes and dust to rearward. They showed only stars ahead. Those stars grew brighter and brighter, as the roar of the rockets diminished to a merely deafening sound. Suddenly the disk of the local sun appeared, rising above the horizon to the west. The spaceboat, naturally, overtook it as it rose into an orbit headed east to west instead of the other way about.

Presently Hoddan turned off the fuel pump. He turned to look thoughtfully at the seven men. They were very pale. They sat unanimously very still, because they could see in the vision plates that a strange, mottled, again-sunlit surface flowed past them with an appalling velocity. They were very much afraid that they knew what it was. They did. It was the surface of the planet Darth, well below them.

"I'm glad you boys came along," said Hoddan. "We'll catch up with the fleet in a moment or two. The pirate fleet, you know! I'm very pleased with you. Not many groundlings would volunteer for space-piracy, not even with the loot there is in it!"

Thal choked slightly, but no one else made a sound. No one even protested. Protests would have been no use. There were looks of anguish, but nothing else, because Hoddan was the only one in the spaceboat who had the least idea of how to get it down again. His passengers had to go along for the ride he'd taken them for, no matter where it led.

Numbly, they waited for what would befall.

VIII

Hoddan did not worry about his followers — captives — noting the obsolescence of the space fleet into which they presently drifted. Ancient hulks and impractical oddities did not seem antique or freakish to them. They had no standards in such matters. The planet Darth seemed slightly off to one side in space, at some times, and at others it seemed underfoot while at others it looked directly overhead. At all times it moved visibly, while the spaceboat and the ships in orbit seemed merely to float in nearly fixed positions. When the dark part of Darth appeared to roll toward the spaceboat again all the bright specks which were ships about them winked out of

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sight and there were only faraway stars and a vast blackness off to one side like nothingness made visible.

The spearmen were wholly subdued when there was light once more and eccentric shapes around them. There was a ring-ship—the hull like a metal wheel with a huge tire, with pipe passages from the tire part to the hub where the control room was located. It seemed unbelievable that such a relic could still exist, dating as it did from the period before gravity-fields could be put into spacecraft. It would have provided a crazy sort of gravity by spinning as it limped from one place to another. Whoever had collected this fleet for the emigrants from Colin must have required only one thing—that there be a hull. Given something that would hold air, a Lawlor drive, a gravity-unit, and air apparatus would turn it into a ship that could go into overdrive and hence cross the galaxy at need. Those who bargained with the emigrants had been content to furnish nothing more than that.

But this could not be appreciated by Hoddan's involuntary crew. The spaceboat drew up alongside the gigantic hulk which was the leader's. The seven Darthians were still numbed by their kidnaping and the situation in which they found themselves.

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They looked with dull eyes at the mountainous object they approached. It had actually been designed as a fighter-carrier of space, intended to carry smaller craft to fight nonexistent warships under conditions which never came about. It must have been sold for scrap a couple of hundred years since, and patched up for this emigration.

Hoddan waited for the huge door to open. It did. He headed into the opening, noticing as he did so that an object two or three times the size of the spaceboat was already there. It cut down the room for maneuvering, but a thing once done is easier thereafter. Hoddan got the boat inside, and there was a very small scraping and the great door closed before the boat could drift out again.

Hoddan turned to his companions — followers — victims, once the spaceboat was still.

"This," he said in a manner which could only be described as one of smiling ferocity, "is a pirate ship, belonging to the pirate fleet we passed through on the way here. It's manned by characters so murderous that their leaders don't dare land anywhere away from their home star-cluster, or all the galaxy would combine against them, to exterminate them or be exterminated. You've joined that fleet. You're going to get out of this boat and march over that ship yonder. Then you're going to be space pirates under me."

They quivered, but did not protest.

"I'll try you for one voyage," he told them. "There will be plunder. There will be pirate revels. If you serve faithfully and fight well, I'll return you to Don Loris' stronghold with your loot after the one voyage. If you don't"— He grinned mirthlessly at them—"out the air lock with you, to float forever between the stars. Understand?"

The last was pure savagery. They cringed. The outside-pressure meter went up to normal. Hoddan turned off the vision screens, so ending any view of the interior of the hold. He opened the port and went out. Sitting in something like continued paralysis in their seats, the seven spearmen of Darth heard his voice in conversation outside the boat. They could catch no words, but Hoddan's tone was strictly business-like. He came back.

"All right," he said shortly. "Thal, march 'em over."

Thal gulped. He loosened his seat belt. The enlistment of the seven in the pirate fleet was tacitly acknowledged. They were unarmed save for the conventional large knives at their belts.

"Frrrd, *harch!*" rasped Thal with a lump in his throat. "Two, three, four. *Hup* two, three, four. *Hup*—"

Seven men marched dismally out of the spaceboat and down to the floor of the huge hold. Eyes front, chests out, throats dry, they marched to the larger but still small vessel that shared this hold compartment. They marched into that ship. Thal barked, *"Halt!"* and they stopped. They waited.

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Hoddan came in very matter-of-factly only moments later. He closed the entrance port, so sealing the ship. He nodded approvingly.

"You can break ranks now," he said. "There's food and such stuff around. The ship's yours. But don't turn knobs or push buttons until you've asked me what for!"

He went forward, and a door closed behind him.

He looked at the control board, and could have done with a little information himself. When the ship was built, generations ago, there'd been controls installed which would be quite useless now. When the present working instruments were installed, it had been done so hastily that the wires and relays behind them were not concealed, and it was these that gave him the clues to understand them.

The space ark's door opened. Hoddan backed his ship out. Its rockets had surprising power. He reflected that the Lawlor drive wouldn't have been designed for this present ship, either. There'd probably been a quantity order for so many Lawlor drives, and they'd been installed on whatever needed a modern drive-system, which was every ship in the fleet. But since this was one of the smallest craft in the lot, with its low mass it should be fast.

"We'll see," he said to nobody in particular.

Out in emptiness, but naturally sharing the orbit of the ship from which it had just come, Hoddan tried it out tentatively. He got the feel of it. Then as a matter of simple, rule-of-thumb astrogation, he got from a low orbit to a five-diameter height where the Lawlor drive would take hold by mere touches of rocket power. It was simply a matter of stretching the orbit to extreme eccentricity as all the ships went round the planet. After the fourth go round he was fully five diameters out at aphelion. He touched the Lawlor-drive button and everybody had that very peculiar disturbance of all their senses which accompanies going into overdrive. The small craft sped through emptiness at a high multiple of the speed of light.

Hoddan's knowledge of astrogation was strictly practical. He went over his ship. From a look at it outside he'd guessed that it once had been a yacht. Various touches inside verified that idea. There were two staterooms. All the hull-space was for living and supplies. None was for cargo. He nodded. There was a faint mustiness about it. But there'd been a time when it was some rich man's pride.

He went back to the control room to make an estimate. From the pilot's seat one could see a speck of brightness directly ahead. Infinitesimal dots of brightness appeared, grew swiftly brighter and then darted outward. As they darted they disappeared because their motion became too swift to follow. There were, of course, methods of measuring this phenomenon so that one could get an accurate measure of one's speed in overdrive. Hoddan had no instrument for

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the purpose. But he had the feel of things. This was a very fast ship indeed, at full Lawlor thrust.

Presently he went out to the central cabin. His followers had found provisions. There were novelties—hydroponic fruit, for instance—and they'd gloomily stuffed themselves. They were almost resigned, now. Memory of the loot he'd led other men to at Ghek's castle inclined them to be hopeful. But they looked uneasy when he stopped where they were gathered.

"Well?" he said sharply.

Thal swallowed.

"We have been companions, Bron Hoddan," he said unhappily. "We fought together in great battles, two against fifty, and we plundered the slain."

"True enough," agreed Hoddan. If Thal wanted to edit his memories of the fighting at the spaceport, that was all right with him. "Now we're headed for something much better."

"But what?" asked Thal miserably. "Here we are high above our native world—"

"Oh, no!" said Hoddan. "You couldn't even pick out its sun, from where we are now!"

Thal gulped.

"I . . . do not understand what you want with us," he protested. "We are not experienced in space! We are simple men—"

"You're pirates now," Hoddan told him with a sort of genial bloodthirstiness. "You'll do what I tell you until we fight. Then you'll fight well or die. That's all you need to know!"

He left them. When men are to be led it is rarely wise to discuss policy or tactics with them. Most men work best when they know only what is expected of them. Then they can't get confused and they do not get ideas of how to do things better.

Hoddan inspected the yacht more carefully. There were still traces of decorative features which had nothing to do with space-worthiness. But the mere antiquity of the ship made Hoddan hunt more carefully. He found a small compartment packed solidly with supplies. A supply-cabinet did not belong where it was. He hauled out stuff to make sure. It was . . . it had been . . . a machine shop in miniature. In the early days, before spacephones were long-range devices, a yacht or a ship that went beyond orbital distance was strictly on its own. If there were a breakdown, it was strictly private. It had to repair itself or else. So all early spacecraft carried amazingly complete equipment for repairs. Only liners are equipped that way in recent generations, and it is almost unheard-of for their tool shops to be used.

But there was the remnant of a shop on the yacht that Hoddan had in hand for his errand to Walden. He'd told the emigrant leaders that he went to ask for charity. He'd just assured his followers that their journey was for piracy. Now—

He began to empty the cubbyhole

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of all the items that had been packed into it for storage. It had been very ingenious, this miniature repair shop. The lathe was built in with strength-members of the walls as part of its structure. The drill press was recessed. The welding apparatus had its coils and condensers under the floor. The briefest of examinations showed the condensers to be in bad shape, and the coils might be hopeless. But there was good material used in the old days. Hoddan began to have quite unreasonable hopes.

He went back to the control room to meditate.

He'd had a reasonably sound plan of action for the pirating of a space-liner, even though he had no weapons mounted on the ship nor anything more deadly than stun-pistols for his reluctant crew. But he considered it likely that he could make the same sort of landing with this yacht that he'd already done with the spaceboat. Which should be enough.

If he waited off Walden until a liner went down to the planet's great spaceport, he could try it. He would go into a close orbit around Walden which would bring him, very low, over the landing-grid within an hour or so of the liner's landing. He'd turn the yacht end for end and apply full rocket power for deceleration. The yacht would drop like a stone into the landing-grid. Everything would happen too quickly for the grid crew to think of clapping a force field on it, or for them to manage it if they tried. He'd be aground before they realized it.

The rest was simply fast action. Hoddan and seven Darthians, stun-pistols humming, would tumble out of the yacht and dash for the control room of the grid. Hoddan would smash the controls. Then they'd rush the landed liner, seize it, shoot down anybody who tried to oppose them, and seal up the ship.

And then they'd take off. On the liner's rockets, which were carried for emergency landing only, but could be used for a single take-off. After one such use they'd be exhausted. And with the grid's controls smashed, nobody could even try to stop them.

It wasn't a bad idea. He had a good deal of confidence in it. It was the reason for his Darthian crew. Nobody'd expect such a thing to be tried, so it almost certainly could be done. But it did have the drawback that the yacht would have to be left behind, a dead loss, when the liner was seized.

Hoddan thought it over soberly. Long before he reached Walden, of course, he could have his own crew so terrified that they'd fight like fiends for fear of what he might do to them if they didn't. But if he could keep the space-yacht also—

He nodded gravely. He liked the new possibility. If it didn't work, there was the first plan in reserve. In any case he'd get a modern space-liner and a suitable cargo to present to the emigrants of Colin. And afterward—

There were certain electronic circuits which were akin. The Lawlor

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drive unit formed a force field, a stress in space, into which a nearby ship necessarily moved. The faster-than-light angle came from the fact that it worked like a donkey trotting after a carrot held in front of him by a stick. The ship moving into the stressed area moved the stress. The force fields of a landing-grid were similar. A tuning principle was involved, but basically a landing-grid clamped an area of stress around a spaceship, and the ship couldn't move out of it. When the landing-grid moved the stressed area up or down—why—that was it.

All this was known to everybody. But a third trick had been evolved on Zan. It was based on the fact that ball lightning could be generated by a circuit fundamentally akin to the other two. Ball lightning was an area of space so stressed that its energy-content could leak out only very slowly, unless it made contact with a conductor, when all bets were off. It blew. And the Zan pirates used ball lightning to force the surrender of their victims.

Hoddan began to draw diagrams. The Lawlor drive-unit had been installed long after the yacht was built. It would be modern, with no nonsense about it. With such-and-such of its electronic components cut out, and such-and-such other ones cut in, it would become a perfectly practical ball-lightning generator, capable of placing bolts wherever one wanted them. This was standard Zan practice. Hoddan's grandfather had used it for years. It had the advantage that it could be used inside a gravity field, where a Lawlor drive could not. It had the other advantage that commercial spacecraft could not mount such gadgets for defense, because the insurance companies objected to meddling with Lawlor drive installations.

Hoddan set to work with the remnants of a tool shop on the ancient yacht and some antique coils and condensers and such. He became filled with zest. He almost forgot that he was the skipper of an elderly craft which should have been scrapped before he was born.

But even he grew hungry, and he realized that nobody offered him food. He went indignantly into the yacht's central saloon and found his seven crew-members snoring stertorously, sprawled in stray places here and there.

He woke them with great sternness. He set them furiously to work on that housekeeping—including meals—which can be neglected in a feudal castle because strong outside winds blow smells away and dry up smelly objects, but which must be practiced in a spaceship.

He went back to work. Suddenly he stopped and meditated afresh, and ceased his actual labor to draw a diagram which he regarded with great affection. He returned to his adaptation of the Lawlor drive to the production of ball lightning.

It was possible to wind coils. A certain percentage of the old condensers held a charge. He tapped

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the drive-unit for brazing current, and the drill-press became a die-stamping device for small parts. He built up the elements of a vacuum tube such as is normally found only in a landing-grid control room. He set up a vacuum-valve arrangement in the base of a large glass jar. He put that jar in the boat's air lock, bled the air to emptiness, and flashed the tube's quaint elements. He brought it back and went out of overdrive while he hooked the entire new assembly into the drive-circuit, with cut-outs and switches to be operated from the yacht's instrument board.

Finished, he examined the stars. The nearby suns were totally strange in their arrangement. But the Coal-sack area was a space-mark good for half a sector of the galaxy. There was a condensation in the Nearer Rim for a second bearing. And a certain calcium cloud with a star-cluster behind it was as good as a highway sign for locating one's self.

He lined up the yacht again and went into overdrive once more. Two days later he came out, again surveyed the cosmos, again went into overdrive, again came out, once more made a hop in faster-than-light travel—and he was in the solar system of which Walden was the ornament and pride.

He used the telescope and contemplated Walden on its screen. The space yacht moved briskly toward it. His seven Darthian crewmen, aware of coming action, dolefully sharpened their two-foot knives. They did not know what else to do, but they were far from happy.

Hoddan shared their depression. Such gloomy anticipations before stirring events are proof that a man is not a fool. Hoddan's grandfather had been known to observe that when a man can imagine all kinds of troubles and risks and disasters ahead of him, he is usually right. Hoddan shared that view. But it would not do to back out now.

He examined Walden painstakingly while the yacht sped on. He saw an ocean come out of the twilight zone of dawn. By the charts, the capital city and the spaceport should be on that ocean's western shore. After a suitable and very long interval, the site of the capital city came around the edge of the planet.

From a bare hundred thousand miles, Hoddan stepped up magnification to its limit and looked again. Then Walden more than filled the telescope's field. He could see only a very small fraction of the planet's surface. He had to hunt before he found the capital city again. Then it was very clear. He saw the curving lines of its highways and the criss-cross pattern of its streets. Buildings as such, however, did not show. But he made out the spaceport and the shadow of the landing-grid, and in the very center of that grid there was something silvery which cast a shadow of its own. A ship. A liner.

There was a tap on the control-room door. Thal.

"Anything happening?" he asked uneasily.

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"I just sighted the ship we're going to take," said Hoddan.

Thal looked unhappy. He withdrew. Hoddan plotted out the extremely roundabout course he must take to end up with the liner and the yacht traveling in the same direction and the same speed, so capture would be possible.

He put the yacht on the line required. He threw on full power. Actually, he headed partly away from his intended victim. The little yacht plunged forward. Nothing seemed to happen. Time passed. Hoddan had nothing to do but worry. He worried.

Thal tapped on the door again.

"About time to get ready to fight?" he asked dolefully.

"Not yet," said Hoddan. "I'm running away from our victim, now."

Another half hour. The course changed. The yacht was around behind Walden. The whole planet lay between it and its intended prey. The course of the small ship curved, now. It would pass almost close enough to clip the topmost tips of Walden's atmosphere. There was nothing for Hoddan to do but think morbid thoughts. He thought them.

The Lawlor drive began to burble. He cut it off. He sat gloomily in the control room, occasionally glancing at the nearing expanse of rushing mottled surface presented by the now-nearby planet. Its attraction bent the path of the yacht. It was now a parabolic curve.

Presently the surface diminished a little. The yacht was increasing its distance from it. Hoddan used the telescope. He searched the space ahead with full-width field. He found the liner. It rose steadily. The grid still thrust it upward with an even, continuous acceleration. It had to be not less than forty thousand miles out before it could take to overdrive. But at that distance it would have an outward velocity which would take it on out indefinitely. At ten thousand miles, certainly, the grid-fields would let go.

They did. Hoddan could tell because the liner had been pointed base down toward the planet when the force fields picked it up. Now it wabbled slightly. It was free. It was no longer held solidly. From now on it floated up on momentum.

Hoddan nibbled at his fingernails. There was nothing to be done for forty minutes more. Presently there was nothing to be done for thirty. For twenty. Ten. Five. Three. Two—

The liner was barely twenty miles away when Hoddan fired his rockets. They made a colossal cloud of vapor in emptiness. The yacht stirred faintly, shifted deftly, lost just a suitable amount of velocity—which now was nearly straight up from the planet—and moved with precision and directness toward the liner. Hoddan stirred his controls and swung the whole small ship. Here, obviously, he could not use the space-drive for its proper purpose. But a switch cut out certain elements of the Lawlor unit and cut in those others which

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made the modified drive-unit into a ball-lightning projector.

A flaming speck of pure incandescence sped from the yacht through emptiness. It would miss— No. Hoddan swerved it. It struck the liner's hull. It would momentarily paralyze every bit of electric equipment in the ship. It would definitely not go unnoticed.

"Calling liner," said Hoddan painfully into a microphone. "Calling liner! We are pirates, attacking your ship. You have ten seconds to get into your lifeboats or we will hull you!"

He settled back, again nibbling at his fingernails. He was acutely disturbed. At the end of ten seconds the distance between the two ships was perceptibly less.

He flung a second ball-lightning bolt across the diminished space. He sent it whirling round and round the liner in a tight spiral. He ended by having it touch the liner's bow. Liquid light ran over the entire hull.

"Your ten seconds are up," he said worriedly. "If you don't get out—"

But then he relaxed. A boat-blister on the liner opened. The boat did not release itself. It could not possibly take on its complement of passengers and crew in so short a time. The opening of the blister was a sign of surrender.

The two first ball-lightning bolts were miniatures. Hoddan now projected a full-sized ball. It glittered viciously in emptiness, the plasma-gas necessary for its existence furnishing a medium for radiation. It sped toward the liner and hung off its side, menacingly. The yacht from Darth moved steadily closer. Five miles. Two.

"All out," said Hoddan regretfully. "We can't wait any longer!"

A boat darted away from the liner. A second. A third and fourth and fifth. The last boat lingered desperately. The yacht was less than a mile away when it broke free and plunged frantically toward the planet it had left a little while before. The other boats were already streaking downward, trails of rocket-fumes expanding behind them. The crew of the landing-grid would pick them up for safe and gentle landing.

Hoddan sighed in relief. He played delicately upon the yacht's rocket-controls. He carefully maneuvered the very last of the novelties he had built into an originally simple Lawlor drive-unit. The two ships came together with a distinct clanking sound. It seemed horribly loud.

Thal jerked open the door, ashen-white.

"W-we hit something! Wh-when do we fight?"

Hoddan said ruefully:

"I forgot. The fighting's over. But bring your stun-pistols. Nobody'd stay behind, but somebody might have gotten left."

He rose, to take over the captured ship.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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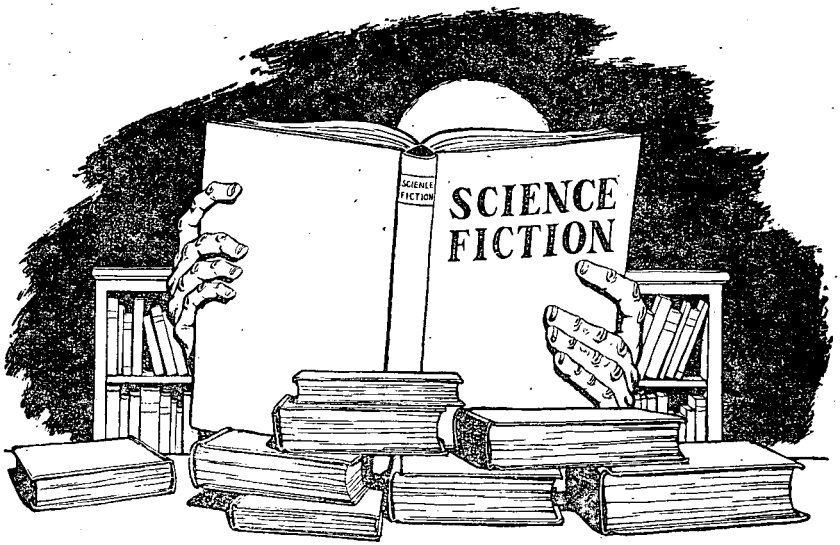

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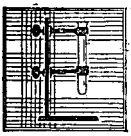

ELSEWHERE in the magazine, John Campbell has been giving you a running account of the Interplanetary Exploration Society, the society of "gentlemen amateurs" in speculative thinking which was launched with his editorial in the July, 1958 issue of Astounding. The need and philosophy on which that association of natural philosophers is based, was made pretty clear in that editorial.

The name of the organization, as you know, is deliberately misleading: it is *not* just another rocket society, or a federation of would-be Moon-travelers. There are plenty of organizations in those fields in which amateur

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specialists in one part of science can advance their ideas and make their contributions. The same is true of other fields: the great majority of data in such fields as ornithology, variable-star observing, or North American archeology are collected by the people who the Director of the New York State Museum once dubbed "part-time scholars." In the one I know best, archeology, you will find amateurs who make their living as time clerks, chemists, steel workers, electrical repairmen, farmers, printers, storekeepers, bankers, industrialists, all doing their best to fill the vast gap caused by the fact that our society simply will not support enough full-time archeologists to keep ahead of the permanent destruction of evidence by factories, cities, dams, highways, and military installations.

Most of this part-time scholarship is carried on on the data-collecting level, and is not at all the kind of thing John is after in his IES. Nevertheless, the best amateur societies have journals which are as open to conjecture and argument as they are to collecting facts for someone else to digest. And two books that have come my way recently are prime examples of the Gentleman Amateur at work.

"Aku-Aku" (Rand McNally & Co.; 1958; 384 pp.; $6.95) is Thor Heyerdahl's popular account of his expedition to Easter Island. You may have read it by now, or have seen a condensation in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Heyerdahl, as I am sure you know, believes and is trying to prove that Polynesia was peopled, at least in part, by some of the more advanced peoples of western South America—the Incas and pre-Incas among them. He is not a Mu or Atlantis disciple, though there are indications that he would like to carry the process still farther back and derive the higher elements of Middle and South American civilization from east to the Atlantic, by way of tall, white, red-headed wanderers.

"Aku-Aku" is not a scientific study. It is, like "Kon Tiki" before it, a popular book of travel and adventure, written for the express purpose of becoming a best-seller and paying for the very expensive business of finding the data to support the author's theory. As such, it is fascinating reading—except for the last half, which becomes a repetitious acount of Heyerdahl's efforts to separate the natives from their family fetishes, and theirs to keep them or to pass off recent sculptures as old—and it points up Heyerdahl's great strength, which even the most orthodox of his critics grant him: when he needs evidence, he goes out and looks for it.

This book proves nothing about the peopling of Easter Island, and I think it could have done a little more in the way of setting out the evidence. We are told only that radio-carbon dates were obtained, and what they are—not what laboratory did the dating. The scientific report is still to come, just as the scientific reasoning behind the Kon Tiki expedition is not in Heyerdahl's popular account, but in the massive compendium of fact and opinion called "American In-

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dians in the Pacific." One thing is clear: Thor Heyerdahl has collected more evidence about Easter Island than any preceding expedition, including the French one of twenty years ago that was so inadequately described in Alfred Metraux' "Easter Island," last year.

Heyerdahl is a Gentleman Amateur of anthropology who has taught himself of its disciplines, and abides by them, because he refuses to adopt the so-common attitude that there is one set of rules for the professional and another, looser set for the speculator. No archeologist, he took competent field workers with him to do his digging. He is clearly working over and refining his own theories: for example, he has and presents the evidence that the last wave of immigrants to Easter Island were Polynesians, who arrived just about when the orthodox anthropolgists have said they did —but he balances this with indications and a conviction that other people, who he believes were from Peru, were there more than one thousand years earlier.

"Earth's Shifting Crust," by Charles H. Hapgood (Pantheon Books, N. Y.; 1958; 438 pp. $6.50) is another book in which a Gentleman Amateur is trying to prove an unorthodox hunch—that the crust of the Earth, including both the continents and the sea bottoms, slips around like a skidding throw rug on the softer interior. Hapgood is a teacher, and I gather not a science teacher or he would have said so. Where Thor Heyerdahl has used the methods of the anthropologist to solve an anthropological problem, Hapgood — like Velikovsky before him—has contented himself with the techniques of a literary scholar, gathering up disconnected but favorable scraps of testimony from here and there without making any real attempt to understand them in their proper context.

Hapgood finds nothing strange, for example, in his taking what is purely a geological argument to Einstein—a mathematical physicist—and George Sarton—a historian of science: two men who had no reason to be informed in this field, and whose opinions on the soundness of his reasoning would mean nothing at all. He seems to feel that they endorsed his theory and his evidence for it; in fact, they endorsed his seeing that there is a problem and his seeking to solve it. They were, you might say, writing testimonials for the idea behind John Campbell's "Society for Speculative Thinking."

There is abundant evidence in the book that Hapgood just does not understand the evidence, geological or mathematical, that he is using. The ironic thing is that he seems to be advancing a correct conclusion for most of the wrong reasons.

In the past few years, the scientific journals have been rather full of short papers—studies of the direction of the magnetic field in rocks of many ages, and from many parts of the Earth—that bear out Hapgood's theory that the poles—at least, the magnetic poles —have wandered around over the

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seas and continents. For some reason, he pays very little attention to these data and a good deal more to vague conjectures, some of which run back a hundred years to a time when geology was in its infancy as a science, and there were only Gentlemen Amateurs to study it.

Hapgood's gimmick, which is the real point of his book, is that centrifugal unbalance in the polar ice caps will set the entire crust skidding, just as an unbalanced centrifuge tube will tear the whole mechanism apart. He seems dead set against the suggestion of geologists that unbalance in the crust itself is the mechanism—yet it certainly seems that the latter effect is greater by many magnitudes, and that the centrifugal effect of an off-center ice cap would probably be to send the ice slipping over the underlying rock, rather than to shift the entire crust of the Earth. (The one thousand times magnification due to a "wedging effect" that he uses to make his figures plausible in magnitude just doesn't make sense: if you follow his argument through arithmetically, the "magnification" becomes greater the smaller the wedging, until the force becomes infinite on a perfectly spherical planet with no equatorial bulge.)

Ten years of library work are said to have gone into "Earth's Shifting Crust," and it would take at least as long to check all the author's four hundred sixty-five references, and as long again to determine which data are still valid and which aren't, in light of later investigations. Only then could a critic start to evaluate the author's reasoning. The arguments against Heyerdahl, on the other hand, are primarily against his reasoning from evidence that orthodox anthropologists accept as pertinent and for the most part real—there are some exceptions.

Both Thor Heyerdahl and Charles Hapgood are examples of amateurs who have had original ideas about scientific problems, and who have set out to gather evidence to support them. But Heyerdahl is the kind of Gentleman Amateur who fits into the philosophy of John Campbell's Interplanetary Exploration Society, and I don't think Hapgood is.

* * * * * * *

The 17th World Science Fiction Convention will be held in the Fort Shelby Hotel, Detroit, next Labor Day week end, September 5th, 6th and 7th. If you're within traveling distance of Detroit, I cannot conceive any really good reason why you won't be there. A recent bulletin from Arthur D. Little, the noted industrial consultant, says of the recent Geneva conference on peaceful uses of atomic energy: "the corridors at Geneva were almost as important as the meeting rooms." That's true, too, of science-fiction conventions. In fact, if you live in the Midwest, you have just about time to get a reservation for the 10th Midwestcon, to be held at the North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati 37, Ohio on June 27-28. The Midwestcons are one hundred

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per cent "corridor"—just make your motel reservation and show up.

As for the Detention—as it's calling itself—there is a program, and there will be a series of booklets—probably two by the time you read this—describing the plans. Since all this costs money, a $2 membership fee is requested in advance—though you can just show up and register, and many do. Send your dues to Jim Broderick, the Detention Treasurer, at 12011 Kilbourne, Detroit 13, Michigan. Pittsburgh, Washington and Philadelphia are bidding for the 1960 convention. Naturally, I'm plugging for Pittsburgh—and shuddering at the work involved.

* * * * * * *

Perri Press of Box 5007, Portland 13, Oregon has just announced the publication in 1959 of a companion to Donald Day's notable "Index to the Science Fiction Magazines, 1926-1950." The new index covers the years from 1951 through 1957, and has been compiled by Norman Metcalf—now in the Air Force—who has more first-hand knowledge of who wrote what, and what was in the story, than any six fans I have ever met.

The new Index will cost $6.50 if you order it in advance, and $8.50 if you wait until it is out. It is well worth it to any collector of SF magazines. The original (1926-1950) Index is still available at $6.50 from Perri—no matter what the rare book dealers say. Once the supplement is out, the price goes up to $8.50 to match it. These are solidly bound, offset-printed books which give you the contents of all the SF magazines for the period covered—and in the confused state of the art, will certainly include some fantasy.

I have just received from Gnome Press the first three volumes in the new Fitzroy Edition of the novels of Jules Verne. This is an English series, edited by I. O. Evans, who put together the collection of Verne excerpts that I reviewed here some months ago. I understand that they are new translations, and that some are of books never available before in English.

These books won't, of course, all be science fiction. Of the first three, "Five Weeks in a Balloon" is Verne's first imaginative novel and a good adventure story—SF in its time, but not now. "The Begum's Fortune" is the story of two future cities, founded by French and German scientists—utopias that don't quite jell. "A Floating City" is based on Verne's voyage on the *Great Eastern,* the gigantic ocean liner of the early nineteenth century. There will be more at a rate of about six a year, SF and "straight" novels mixed, at $3.00 apiece.

Marty Greenberg, mentor of Gnome, has also reprinted Talbot Mundy's massive 1000-page historical novel of Julius Caesar and the conquest of Britain, "Tros of Samothrace." Tros is the heroic counterpart of Conan, Prince Valiant, and many another swashbuckler, but thanks to the author's skill a far more

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real personality. Even so, the standout portrait is Caesar's—and this is rounded out in the sequel, "Purple Pirate," which carries Tros on into the intrigues of Cleopatra's court. Nobody is writing this kind of lushly wonderful historical fiction now, and Mundy considered that his unorthodox interpretation of the characters of Caesar and Cleopatra is historically correct. Indeed, he ruled a third and intervening novel, "Queen Cleopatra"—written first—out of the series to which it technically belongs, because he felt he would have to rewrite it completely to set Cleopatra's character and motivation straight.

The two books are $4.95 apiece. They're not SF, and only fantasy in parts, but they are *good*.

WHO? by Algis Budrys. Pyramid Books No. G-339. 1958. 157 pp. 35¢.

I enjoyed this story as much as anything of its kind that I've seen in a long time, though cold analysis might be able to shoot it full of air. This may be because I like mystery thrillers, and no longer try to outsmart the author, but follow along where he leads for no reason but enjoyment.

Lucas Martino, one of the West's top scientists, is kidnaped into the Soviet zone of Europe after an explosion that nearly destroys him. Much later the Reds send back someone who has been rebuilt into a part man, part robot, with a metal left arm, skull, face, and assorted inner repairs. The question Allied Nations Government agent Shawn Rogers must answer is: is this half-man Martino . . . or is he a substitute, sent into the Allied world to take Martino's place, do his work, and pass Western scientific secrets back to his masters? Even if it is Martino, is he still a free man or has he been brainwashed and made into a Soviet puppet?

Having posed his problem, and shown that it is insoluble, the author then begins to solve it for the reader by presenting a series of short flashbacks in which the early life of the real Martino is followed up to the fatal explosion. We see apparent clues that should answer the riddle . . . see Rogers run them down . . . and see them prove useless. Finally the answer does unfold with completely logical irony.

Algis Budrys should be able to weave some very tricky orthodox—or unorthodox—mysteries, if he wants to—the kind with both puzzle and character important.

THE SPACE EGG, by Russ Winterbotham. Avalon Books, New York. 1958. 224 pp. $2.75.

Russ Winterbotham is an old-time newspaperman who earned himself half a column in Day's *Index to the Science Fiction Magazines,* back in the 1930s and early '40s. He's kept a limited newspaper market open for

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science fiction that he liked, and of late has been trying his hand at it again. This was the complete novel in the March '58 *Amazing*—the story of a test pilot and a woman possessed by beings from space, who take over and make over their bodies and—of course—are watching for the opportunity to move in on all mankind.

A very ordinary plot, ready-made for Hollywood or TV, is redeemed by the kind of competent story-telling that you'd expect from that other old pro, Murray Leinster. Even though you know what's coming next, you're carried along to see it happen. It would be right where it belongs as an Ace paperback original, and even at $2.75 it is a lot better than some of the other recent titles in this uneven Avalon series. No Roman candle—but no wet fuse, either.

STARHAVEN, by Ivar Jorgenson. Avalon Books, New York. 1958. 220 pp. $2.75.

"Ivar Jorgenson," so gossip at conventions alleges, is a house name that a number of young writers have worn at different times. I don't know who had it on when "Starhaven" was written, but I imagine he's just as happy to be out of sight behind a mask. This just isn't much of a book.

John Mantell, on the beach in the far stars, is accused of murder and escapes to Starhaven in a stolen police ship. This artificial planet is run by Ben Thurdan, tycoon and overlord of an utterly wild lot of thugs and criminals, whose law is the fact that there is no law to protect them from the immediate consequences of their own misdeeds. Mantell is drafted into an effort to strengthen the defenses of the planet against the inevitable police raid. He is also promptly mixed up with Thurdan's current mistress, an anti-Thurdan underground, and a set of puzzling half-memories.

All the elements for a pleasant enough hassle are there, but it somehow never quite holds together. The punches are telegraphed, and a "who cares?" attitude creeps over the reader. Down in the lower levels of the Avalon releases.

TIME IN ADVANCE, by William Tenn. Bantam Books No. A-1786. 1958. 153 pp. 35¢.

Here is another humdinger of a story collection, this time just four long novelettes. Although William Tenn seems identified with this magazine, only one of the four was first published here—the bewildering "Firewater" with its Aliens in bottles, its gabbling, miraculously endowed, reekingly filthy "Primeys," and its businessman hero. I'm not sure I fully understand its point, even yet, or if I do know what the author's message is, that he's sold it to me.

The title story, and the poorest, is from *Galaxy*. It's purely a gimmick yarn: a future society in which you

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can earn the right to commit a crime by serving out a brutal sentence in advance. The development is unfortunately real old corn, and not the kind from bottles. "The Sickness," from *Infinity,* is another gimmick story about an expedition that catches a Martian germ and begins to drop off one by one—only this time the gimmick works, and fits into the nicely built-up setting and situation, with a tightly balanced United States and Russian team captained by an Indian.

Finally there's "Winthrop Was Stubborn" from *Galaxy* again. It's pure entertainment, a time-travel romp about the attempts of an ill-assorted crew of chronic argonauts to persuade or force one of their number to change his mind about staying in the future.

All in all, fun but not a set of classics.

BIG PLANET, by Jack Vance.
SLAVES OF THE KLAU, by Jack Vance. Ace Books No. D-295. 1958. 158+129 pp. 35¢.

This double-Vance is a bargain for the reprint of "Big Planet," that totally delightful *bouillabaisse* of weird, wonderful, wacky societies strewn across the face of a super-planet, through which our hero and his friends must make their way for forty thousand miles. Anything I said in 1957, when the hardcover edition appeared, was an understatement.

The new part is not worth the difference. In detail it's enjoyable—but what detail in a Vance story isn't? In *Startling* or *Thrilling Wonder,* in 1952, it was very good fun. The Klau are indeed horrendous villains, intent on taking over Mankind and for that matter, Monsterkind, on a galactic scale. One stalwart Earthman and a hodgepodge of assorted aliens, that might have come out of Dr. Moreau's lab or an old, old issue of *Weird Tales,* doggedly achieves wonders—much too easily for me—and foils 'em all.

Buy it for "Big Planet," and let the Klau run their mills in peace.

A PLANET FOR TEXANS, by H. Beam Piper & John J. McGuire. STAR BORN, by Andre Norton. Ace Books No. D-299. 1958. 101+186 pp. 35¢.

Again, the reprint half of this Ace Double is the best, but the crazy world of New Texas in the Piper-McGuire opera is also worth the price of admission.

Andre Norton is, for a very quiet person, one of our very best practitioners of swashbuckling, colorful interstellar adventure. "Star Born" is a sequel to "The Stars Are Ours," both published by World as hardbacks; in it a later generation of human colonists on Astra, with their sleek merman friends, at last encounter the cruel, reptilian overlords who once ruled the planet. The story has every-

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thing that ever existed in the "good old days," with all the writing skill needed to make it believable.

"A Planet for Texans" is such fun that it should have paved the way for a series of adventures for Stephen Silk, sitting duck for the Solar League and decoy for its Department of Aggression. New Texas, whose customs are an all-out extrapolation of those enjoyed in Old Texas—they've bodily transplanted the Alamo with all the rest!—is on the verge of being overrun by the z-Srauff, a set of no-good interstellar dog-men —unless it can be persuaded to join the Solar League. Previous League Ambassadors have quit, committed suicide, or lost their minds, so Mr. Silk, a career diplomat who talks too much, is sent out to serve as a z'Srauff target and precipitate a saving annexation by the League. How he outwits everybody, including his employers, is as much fun as anything since the Hokas mixed themselves up in diplomacy. I do hope Silk's retirement isn't permanent!

MATTER, EARTH AND SKY, by George Gamow. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1958. 593 pp. $10.00.

This is not at all the kind of book we have come to expect from the author of the brilliantly lucid "Birth and Death of the Sun," "Biography of the Earth," "One, Two, Three—Infinity" and the "Mr. Tompkins" books. It is a kind of incomplete textbook that covers the entire gamut of sciences: physics, chemistry, biochemistry, geology and astronomy. And I don't know who reads textbooks for fun . . .

By textbook, I mean that some of the elementary laws of mechanics, electricity, *et al* are presented just as formally, and with about the same mathematical accompaniment, that you would find in a high school physics book. Side by side with these you'll find a few—a very few—of the characteristic Gamovian flashes of elucidation, that use just the right analogue or parallel to make a difficult concept seem easy. His "snake-in-the-grass" picture of an electromagnetic field is one such; so is the graphic demonstration that a star is a "mightiest machine" only because of its colossal bulk—if the Sun produced heat at the rate a hummingbird does, the entire solar system would be vapor.

The book is too expensive as a text for a high school general science course, though the school library might get one copy instead of five other books. Some of the things you'd expect to find in anything by Gamow, such as discussion of the Ewing-Donn theory of ice ages, aren't there at all.

For me, the book has too little Gamow in it. I've found several things in it that I'm using for reference purposes, clearly and explicitly spelled out. But, except for occasional flashes, almost anyone could have written it.

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SPUTNIK INTO SPACE, by M. Vassiliev. Dial Press, New York. 1958. 181 pp. $3.75.

This is the American version of an English translation of an Italian translation of a 1955 Russian book written by a Soviet journalist—allegedly with the supervision of a member of the Soviet Academy of Science, though the effect doesn't show. It tells you nothing about the sputniks that hasn't been in the newspapers, and what it does have to say about rockets and satellites is both ultra-elementary and misleading. Where figures are quoted, many of them are wrong.

Whether Comrade Vassiliev is a science reporter, I don't know; we may have made similar hash of space flight in occasional articles, where a journalist without science background tried to enlarge on a wire-service dispatch, but we certainly haven't had any books, even for popular consumption, that are as garbled as this.

That all the "firsts" mentioned in the book are Russian is something we're used to by now, but certainly escape velocity from the Earth isn't 6.84 miles a second West of the Iron Curtain, and 8.25 miles a second on the Soviet side. Nor are such figures military secrets that have to be kept from the Russian public as well as foreign readers. Accelerations aren't expressed as velocity in Soviet physics—but they are in this book.

Some of the confusion, I suspect, has resulted from the tortuous route by which the book has reached us, through the intermediaries of Italian and English translators, neither of whom may have known much science. If, at any stage, a typist tried to transcribe a handwritten manuscript, the confusion would have been compounded. On page 110, it seems to me that a line or lines have been skipped. "Ratio of reverberation" for the common astronomical term "albedo" may be Russian or Italian usage, or it may be a nonscientist trying to translate technical language for the man-in-the-street.

There's clearer evidence on page 89, that even William Beller, the co-author of "Satellite" who has annotated the present Dial edition, seems to have missed. In parts of Europe the convention is to use a comma where English-American usage calls for a decimal point. This converts 4.830 miles a second into 4,830 miles a second—a very different thing.

As it happens, the September 8th issue of *Rockets and Missiles* reports that an authentic, scientific book by A. Shternfeld, a competent Russian rocket expert, has just been published in English translation. No details or price given; I'll try to get a copy and report, but if you're seriously interested you may have it before I do. It is published by the Foreign Technical Information Center, Office of Technical Services, United States Department of Commerce, Washington 25, D. C.

Two items in the Vassiliev book may be planted leaks, over-boasting

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by an uninformed reporter, or even the truth. Vassiliev says twice that Russia *has* sent a man "into space" and returned him safely. This probably means no more than a test-flight in a high-altitude rocket plane, such as our own pilots have made. The author seems to think, however, that he's talking about a manned satellite. Could just be something that the Soviets planned for the IGY, and released to their own press, but that didn't come off. Maybe other people have publicity problems, too.

The other interesting statement is that one Professor Pokrowsky has used something called "cumulative explosion"—which in the confused explanation reads like the shaped-charge effect—to strip atoms down to a state like that found in white dwarf stars (pp. 22-23). This is supposed to have been done back in 1946. What Vassiliev is probably talking about is pioneer work in what is now called magneto-hydrodynamics.

THE NEW REPRINTS

WORLDS OF TOMORROW, edited by August Derleth. Berkley Books, N. Y., No. G-163. 1958. 172 pp. 35¢

Ten of the nineteen stories in the original hard-bound anthology.

A MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS, by Edgar Pangborn. Dell Books, N. Y., No. D-246. 1958. 223 pp. 35¢

The best of the "Martians among us" stories, and one of the best SF novels of all time. It won the International Fantasy Award for best novel of 1954.

THE MURDER OF THE MISSING LINK, by Vercors. Pocket Books, N. Y., No. 1206. 1958. 196 pp. 25¢

This ridiculous title conceals Vercors' "You Shall Know Them," and has the one beneficial result of giving it a mystery classification, and hence a lower price than SF. The murder of the title precipitates a showdown over the question of whether a race of sub-men are human, exploited as slaves, or domestic animals.

TWICE IN TIME, by Manley Wade Wellman. Galaxy Novel No. 34. 1958. 191 pp. 35¢

When it was new, in 1940, this was a pretty good version of the "time traveler who is really Leonardo da Vinci" plot. It's still fun, or Avalon Books wouldn't have published a hard-cover edition in 1957.

THE END

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BRASS

TACKS

To be read after you have finished "Despoilers of the Golden Empire."

Dear John,

It has been brought to my attention, by those who have read the story, that "Despoilers of the Golden Empire" might conceivably be charged with being a "reader cheater"—*i.e.*, that it does not play fair with the reader, but leads him astray by means of false statements. Naturally, I feel it me bounden duty to refute such scurrilous and untrue affronts, and thus save meself from opprobrium.

Therefore, I address what follows to the interested reader:

It cannot be denied that you must have been misled when you read the story; indeed, I'd be the last to deny it, since I *intended* that you should be misled. What I most certainly *do* deny is any implication that such misleading was accomplished by the telling of untruths. A fiction writer is, *by definition,* a professional liar; he makes his living by telling interesting

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lies on paper and selling the results to the highest bidder for publication. Since fiction writing is my livelihood, I cannot and will not deny that I am an accomplished liar—indeed, almost an habitual one. Therefore, I feel some small pique when, on the one occasion on which I stick strictly to the truth, I am accused of fraud. *Pfui!* say I; I refute you. "I deny the allegation, and I defy the alligator!"

To prove my case, I shall take several examples from "Despoilers" and show that the statements made are perfectly valid. (Please note that I do not claim any absolute accuracy for such details as quoted dialogue, except that none of the characters lies. I simply contend that the story is as accurate as any other good historical novelette. I also might say here that any resemblance between "Despoilers" and any story picked at random from the late lamented *Planet Stories* is purely intentional and carefully contrived.)

Take the first sentence:

"In the seven centuries that had elapsed since the Second Empire had been founded on the shattered remnants of the First, the nobles of the Imperium had come slowly to realize that the empire was not to be judged by the examples of its predecessor."

Perfectly true. By the time of the Renaissance, the nobles of the Holy Roman Empire knew that their empire was not just a continuation of the Roman Empire, but a new entity. The old Roman Empire had collapsed in the Sixth Century, and the *Holy* Roman Empire, which was actually a loose confederation of Germanic states, did not come into being until A. D. 800, when Karl der Grosse (Charlemagne) was crowned emperor by the Pope.

Anyone who wishes to quibble that the date should be postponed for a century and a half, until the time of the German prince, Otto, may do so; I will ignore him.

A few paragraphs later, I said:

"Without power, neither Civilization nor the Empire could hold itself together, and His Universal Majesty, the Emperor Carl, well knew it. And power was linked solidly to one element, one metal . . ."

The metal, as I said later on, was Gold-197.

By "power," of course, I meant political and economic power. In the Sixteenth Century, that's what almost anyone would have meant. If you chose to interpret it as meaning "energy per unit time," why, that's real tough.

Why nail the "power metal" down to an isotope of gold with an atomic weight of 197? Because that's the only naturally occurring isotope of gold.

The "Emperor Carl" was, of course, Charles V, who also happened to be King of Spain, and therefore Pizarro's sovereign. I Germanicized his name, as I did the others—Francisco Pizarro becomes "Frank," et cetera—but this is perfectly legitimate. After all, the king's name in Latin, which was used in all state papers, was *Carolus;* the Spanish called him *Carlos,* and history books in English call him *Charles.* Either *Karl* or *Carl* is

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just as legitimate as *Charles,* certainly, and the same applies to the other names in the story.

As to the title "His Universal Majesty," that's exactly what he *was* called. It is usually translated as "His Catholic Majesty," but the word *Catholic* comes from the Greek *katholikos,* meaning "universal." And, further on in the story, when the term "Universal Assembly" is used, it is a direct translation of the Greek term, *Ekklesia Katholikos,* and is actually a better translation than "Catholic Church," since the English word *church* comes from the Greek *kyriakon,* meaning "the house of the Lord"—in other words, a church *building,* not the organization as a whole.

Toward the end of Chapter One, I wrote:

"Throughout the Empire, research laboratories worked tirelessly at the problem of transmuting commoner elements into Gold-197, but thus far none of the processes was commercially feasible."

I think you will admit that the alchemists never found a method of transmuting the elements—certainly none which was commercially feasible.

In Chapter Three, the statement that Pizarro left his home—Spain—with undermanned ships, and had to sneak off illegally before the King's inspectors checked up on him, is historically accurate. And who can argue with the statement that "there wasn't a scientist worthy of the name in the whole outfit"?

At the beginning of Chapter Four, you'll find:

"Due to atmospheric disturbances, the ship's landing was several hundred miles from the point the commander had originally picked . . ." and ". . . the ship simply wasn't built for atmospheric navigation."

The adverse winds which drove Pizarro's ships off course were certainly "atmospheric disturbances," and I defy anyone to prove that a Sixteenth Century Spanish galleon was built for atmospheric navigation.

And I insist that using the term "carrier" instead of "horse," while misleading, is not inaccurate. However, I *would* like to know just what sort of picture the term conjured up in the reader's mind. In Chapter Ten, in the battle scene, you'll find the following:

"The combination [of attackers from both sides], plus the fact that the heavy armor was a little unwieldy, overbalanced him [the commander]. He toppled to the ground with a clash of steel as he and the carrier parted company.

"Without a human hand at its controls, the carrier automatically moved away from the mass of struggling fighters and came to a halt well away from the battle."

To be perfectly honest, it's somewhat of a strain on my mind to imagine anyone building a robot-controlled machine as good as all that, and then giving the drive such poor protection that he can fall off of it.

One of the great screams from my critics has been occasioned by the fact

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that I referred several times to the Spaniards as "Earthmen." I can't see why. In order not to confuse the reader, I invariably referred to them as the "*invading* Earthmen," so as to make a clear distinction between them and the *native* Earthmen, or Incas, who were native to Peru. If this be treachery, then make the most of it.

In other words, I contend that I simply did what any other good detective story writer tries to do—mislead the reader without lying to him. Agatha Christie's "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd," for instance, uses the device of telling the story from the murderer's viewpoint, in the first person, without revealing that he *is* the murderer. Likewise, John Dickson Carr, in his "Nine Wrong Answers" finds himself forced to deny that he has lied to the reader, although he admits that one of his characters certainly lied. Both Carr and Christie told the absolute truth—within the framework of the story—and left it to the reader to delude himself.

It all depends on the viewpoint. The statement, "We all liked Father Goodheart very much" means one thing when said by a member of his old parish in the United States, which he left to become a missionary. It means something else again when uttered by a member of the tribe of cannibals which the good Father attempted unsuccessfully to convert.

Similarly, such terms as "the gulf between the worlds," "the new world," and "the known universe" have one meaning to a science-fictioneer, and another to a historian. Semantics, anyone?

In Chapter Ten, right at the beginning, there is a conversation between Commander Frank and Frater Vincent, and "agent of the Assembly" (read: *priest*). If the reader will go back over that section, keeping in mind the fact that what they are "actually" talking about are the Catholic Church and the Christian religion *as seen from the viewpoint of a couple of fanatically devout Sixteenth Century Spaniards,* he will understand the method I used in presenting the whole story.

Let me quote:

"Mentally, the commander went through the symbol-patterns that he had learned as a child—the symbol-patterns that brought him into direct contact with the Ultimate Power, the Power that controlled not only the spinning of atoms and the whirling of electrons in their orbits, but the workings of probability itself."

Obviously, he is reciting the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria.* The rest of the sentence is self-explanatory.

So is the following:

"Once indoctrinated into the teachings of the Universal Assembly, any man could tap that power to a greater or lesser degree, depending on his mental control and ethical attitude. At the top level, a first-class adept could utilize that Power for telepathy, psychokinesis, levitation, teleportation, and other powers that the commander only vaguely understood."

It doesn't matter whether *you* believe in the miracles attributed to

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many of the Saints; Pizarro certainly did. His faith in that Power was as certain as the modern faith in the power of the atomic bomb.

As a matter of fact, it was very probably that hard, unyielding Faith which made the Sixteenth Century Spaniard the almost superhuman being that he was. Only Spain of the Sixteenth Century could have produced the Conquistadors or such a man as St. Ignatius Loyola, whose learned, devout, and fanatically militant Society of Jesus struck fear into the hearts of Protestant and Catholic Princes alike for the next two centuries.

The regular reader of Astounding may remember that I gave another example of the technique of truthful misdirection in "The Best Policy," (July, 1957). An Earthman, captured by aliens, finds himself in a position in which he is unable to tell even the smallest lie. But by telling the absolute truth, he convinces the aliens that *hōmo sapiens* is a race of super-duper supermen. He does it so well that the aliens surrender without attacking, even before the rest of humanity is aware of their existence.

The facts in "Despoilers of the Golden Empire" remain. They *are* facts. Francisco Pizarro and his men —an army of less than two hundred— actually *did* inflict appalling damage on the Inca armies, even if they were outnumbered ten to one, and with astonishingly few losses of their own. They did it with sheer guts, too; their equipment was not too greatly superior to that of the Peruvians, and by the time they reached the Great Inca himself, none of the Peruvians believed that the invaders were demons or gods. But in the face of the Spaniards' determined onslaught, they were powerless.

The assassination scene at the end is almost an exact description of what happened. It *did* take a dozen men in full armor to kill the armorless Pizarro, and even then it took trickery and treachery to do it.

Now, just to show how fair I was —to show how I scrupulously refrained from lying—I will show what a sacrifice I made for the sake of truth.

If you'll recall, in the story, the dying Pizarro traces the Sign of the Cross on the floor in his own blood, kisses it, and says *"Jesus!"* before he dies. This is in strict accord with every history on the subject I could find.

But there is a legend to the effect that his last words were somewhat different. I searched the New York Public Library for days trying to find one single historian who would bear out the legend; I even went so far as to get a librarian who could read Spanish and another whose German is somewhat better than mine to translate articles in foreign historical journals for me. All in vain. But if I *could* have substantiated the legend, the final scene would have read something like this:

> Clawing at his sword-torn throat, the fearless old soldier brought his hand away coated with the crimson of his own blood. Falling forward,

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he traced the Sign of the Cross on the stone floor in gleaming scarlet, kissed it, and then glared up at the men who surrounded him, his eyes hard with anger and hate.

"I'm going to Heaven," he said, his voice harsh and whispery. "And *you,* you *bastards,* can go to *Hell!*"

It would have made one hell of an ending—but it had to be sacrificed in the interests of Truth.

So I rest my case.

I will even go further than that; I defy anyone to point out a single out-and-out lie in the whole story. G'wan—I *dare* ya!

(SECRET ASIDE TO THE READER; J. W. C., Jr., PLEASE DO *NOT* READ!)

Ah, but wait! There *is* a villain in the piece!

I did not lie to you, no. But you were lied to, all the same.

By whom?

By none less than that conniving arch-fiend, John W. Campbell, Jr., that's who!

Wasn't it he who bought the story?

And wasn't it he who, with malice aforethought, published it in a package which was plainly labeled Science Fiction?

And, therefore, didn't you have every right to think it *was* science fiction?

Sure you did!

I am guilty of nothing more than weakness; my poor, frail sense of ethics collapsed completely at the sight of the bribe he offered me to become a party to the dark conspiracy that sprang from the depths of his own demoniac mind. Ah, well; none of us is perfect, I suppose.

DAVID GORDON.

But David—you know we always try to publish a fact article too!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I was fascinated by the article, "Divining Rod, Standard Equipment," by Murray F. Yaco, in the October, 1958 Astounding Science Fiction. I had been introduced to these pipe locators, wishing sticks, or divining rods only three weeks ago.

Ray Barnes of Brookfield who first showed me the rods had come to clean my underground septic tank. We were discussing the location of the overflow line which runs from the septic tank. Since Ray did not have his divining rods with him, he asked for two pieces of heavy wire. I cut an old croquet wicket in half, whereupon Ray paced off parallel to the septic tank until the rods crossed. I was fascinated.

I said: "Will they work for me?" He said, "I guess so." So I tried them. They worked. However, I suspected that I was manipulating the rods which incidentally cross for me rather than swinging away from one another. This should be subjected to more or less rigorous tests.

The results of this test were as follows:

Subject: Mary Squire, wife. The subject was not told the purpose of the test, but merely asked to take the

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two rods and walk along the driveway.

Result: The rods crossed over the line.

Note: This was the line leading into the septic tank. Its position was not known to the subject.

Subject; No. 2: Ruth Squire Kennedy, sister. Again the subject was not told the purpose of the test but merely asked to hold the rods parallel and chest high and walk along the driveway.

Results: The rods crossed over the line.

Note: This was again the line leading into the septic tank.

Possible error in this test: While the subject did not know what was supposed to happen, she had seen the previous test. However, the location of the pipe chosen for the test was at a point some eight feet from the previous test and the subject, a visitor, had absolutely no way of knowing where the line was.

It was felt that while the above two subjects were not told what the purpose of the test was, it was still possible for a somewhat sophisticated adult to have recognized that the test was at least akin to water witching. Therefore, the test was continued with relatively unsophisticated subjects. These were: Horace Charles Squire, third grade, eight years old; Anne Louise Squire, second grade, six years old, Mariella Squire, pre-primary, five years old, Harry Kennedy, seven years old, second grade, Meggin Kennedy, six years old, first grade. The results were as follows:

Horace Charles, who had watched the previous tests as well as the original demonstration, was able to locate any and all pipes.

Harry, walked too fast; the rods crossed but since he did not stop immediately, the results were not conclusive.

Anne and Meggin, results inconclusive, since the rods never steadied, but continued to swing under any and all conditions whether over known water supplies or not.

Mariella, who had been playing with her younger brothers and had not seen the above proceedings, was finally called upon. She was told only to hold the rods before her parallel and to walk slowly forward. She obeyed literally.

Results: She was able to locate any and all underground pipes on which she was tested without ever knowing what the game was all about.

The above results are provocative. They at least suggest two possibilities: 1) the force, or what-have-you, is relatively independent of the faith which the operator has in the results; and 2) tests may be run under controlled conditions to demonstrate the validity of this fact: whether "wishing sticks" fit today or not.

Further note: My sister, Mrs. Kennedy, has returned home. She is going to try to arrange a further test using subjects who will not know (1) the purpose of the test, or (2) the location of any underground lines. Will let you know the results of this, if any.—Horace H. Squire, Associate Dean, Evening Division,

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Worcester Junior College, Worcester, Massachusetts.

So—the "wishing sticks" work even when the operator isn't old enough to wish!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

We, the writers, have read with pleasure an article—October, 1958 Astounding — entitled "Divining Rod: standard equipment," by Mr. Yaco. In short, we confirm all that Mr. Yaco has said, and wish to add to his results. The following is written after a week's experimentation.

We are both radio amateurs, and have had a great interest in electrical, physical and psi phenomena for some time. We have delved into the antics of the "educated coat hangers" and have tentatively discovered some apparent facts:

1. Not everyone can make the witching sticks perform.
2. Skepticism is sudden death to any results.
3. The rods will locate and follow passing aircraft.
4. The rods will detect a wide variety of objects of different materials.
5. Some persons have more ability to make the rods perform than others.
6. Practice improves the performance.
7. At some locations and during certain times, even "adepts" cannot obtain worthwhile results.
8. With deep concentration, the rods can be willed to point in a desired direction.
9. The rods need not be constructed from metal.
10. The rods will open—or cross—and parallel an obstructing wall as the holder approaches it.
11. Water in any object seems to increase activity of the rods.
12. With some experimenters the rods will cross—with others they will open.
13. There is a definite sensation of motive "force" or "power" during times of activity of the rods.
14. We have demonstrated that the performance of these sticks or rods is not dependent upon prior information and instruction concerning the way they "should act."
15. There seems to be an air of "fear" surrounding the adamant skeptic. Some people refuse to even touch them.
16. One may cause the rods to perform by *mentally* placing an object for detection.
17. When one becomes tired from using the rods, the rods' activity and performance tapers off.

In looking over the above points and considering some possible explanations, we have tentatively concluded that the "operator" may be subconsciously moving the rods or causing them to be moved through the use of muscles in his hands. Such use is not detected by the eye, nor can it be perceived in any other

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manner yet discovered. In fact, the operator himself is not consciously aware of movement.

We feel that it is entirely possible that a "field" of some sort surrounds all objects. It also seems possible that a varying field of like sort surrounds the operator, and that this field changes with thought processes.

There is no indication that this so-called field is either electromagnetic or electrostatic, or even electrochemical. We believe, however that known phenomena are somehow tied in with the observed phenomena.

For example, Phil, W2OSY, has been able to precisely measure the spacing of his 8JK antenna while it is suspended some thirty-five feet in the air overhead—and this, without ever glancing up at the antenna. Measurements have shown that when the rods are precisely parallel, he is standing directly under one element at the physical dipole center. A like deflection also occurs underneath the second dipole. Plumb-bob measurements to the ground beneath the deflected rods yielded the exact spacing of the antenna elements.

Loading variations of the antenna seem to cause swinging of the rods. This, to us, is evidence that there may be an electromagnetic or electrostatic field involved.

Objects with varying water content and varying pH values cause deflections of varying intensity and type. Note: try the rods over the morning cup of coffee.

We find that when one of us leaves the room and returns to locate an object placed (hidden) in our absence, it is possible to do so—only if we are told what the object is. In other words, a mental picture and association seems to be necessary.

We would like to hear from you or any interested readers about similar experiments which we may attempt to duplicate. Further, we should like to have advice and comment about our findings.

Incidentally, we have also experimented with the Hieronymus Machine and have had results similar to those published in Astounding—James H. Gray, W2EUQ and Philip D. Ingraham, W2OSY, RFD No. 1, Painted Post, New York.

Fine! You evidently "have it," whatever "it" is, in good measure.

Have you tried "mop dowsing" with photographs?

And—agreed that the operator himself swings the rods, by tipping them probably, the problem remains: How does the operator know WHEN to tip them?

THE END

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(*Continued from page 9*)

Since he's defined "general superiority" as nonexistent, he's going to have some difficulty in defining what the phenomenon *is* so he can detect it when it does appear.

Now let's try looking at the world Nature's been experimenting in for the last dozen billion years or so. Man, for all his foibles, failings, and imperfections, runs the local planet, despite the serious objections of several hundreds of thousands of competing species. Let's use that simple test of "Who runs the place?" as a rule-of-thumb way of judging general superiority. It may not satisfy the theoretician, the purist . . . but the theoretician-purist, after all, does *not* represent the class that runs the place, which may mean he's somewhat prejudiced against that test.

Now in the first place, let's get over the theoretician-purist's cockeyed idea of "eternal truths"; the closest approach to an eternal truth that I know of is that "The Universe changes." No general superiority is an *eternal* superiority.

Also, let's distinguish between the theoretician-purist's concept of "perfect" and the engineer's concept of "optimum." The optimum design for a unit is *not* perfection. Imagine a radio receiver so well designed and built that there would not be a single malfunction of any component for one hundred years. It would be obsolete, of course, long before the century was up; the extra time, effort, research, and material expended in building the "perfect" unit would have been wasted.

General superiority, then, does not mean *eternal* superiority. Neither does it mean absolute, or perfect, superiority. It does mean "I can do anything you can do, and do it markedly better."

That, too, must be broken down somewhat. A man is superior to a fish, but can't outswim or outdive a fish. However, a man-plus-his-tools can outdo a fish.

And the real test is that Man can outsurvive and outaccomplish a fish. The Superman won't, necessarily, *do* all the things he *could* do better, either. The total area of all his accomplishments, however, will surpass the total area of all the normal man's accomplishments. He can match most experts in their own fields—and that means match a team of experts, where no one of the team can match him.

And he will have an ability that none of the experts has, and *which none of them can understand*. The Superman will not be able to explain that ability, nor communicate its nature, because the experts lack the ability and can't, therefore, conceptually visualize it.

Suppose an alien from the planet of a blue-white sun visited us; he can see well into the ultraviolet region of the spectrum. Now he can communicate to us *that* he can see into the UV region . . . but he can never, never explain to us how the colors he sees look to him. He, too, has "three primary colors" in his

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vision-system; red, blue, and farbul. Blue, to him, is the middle of the spectrum, as yellow is to us. This we can understand. But what farbul is *as a sensation* is totally incommunicable.

A general superiority is something that cannot be explained in sensation-realization terms; the superman has it, can use it, and can't ever communicate understanding of its nature. And, of course, the logician-theoretician will, therefore, deny that it has been proven to exist.

I can, however, cite a perfect example of a *general* superiority—and indicate thereby the mechanism of general superiority as a reality-in-the-Universe.

The ability-to-see, as distinct from the ability-to-sense-the-presence-of-light is a perfect example.

Now the ability-to-see is a specific ability, not a general ability, you may protest. Agreed; it is a specific ability . . . at one level. But *it yields general, overall advantages at the next lower level.*

Consider individual members of two branches of a certain species of lizards. One is a cave-adapted branch, the other a normal branch; the cave-adapted type is blind, while the normal branch is normally sighted. We will say that the two are, physically, otherwise perfectly equal in strength, size, weight, reflex quickness, armor and armament.

Now it is perfectly true that, in the cave environment, the cave-adapted type has a slight advantage; it has no sensitive eyes to be scratched, injured, or infected, and the neural mass that would, otherwise, be concerned with interpreting optical images can be diverted to other work. In its own highly limited, specialized environment, it has a slight edge over the normal type. But in the general environment of the planet Earth . . . the sighted type has an overall advantage.

Sight yields an advantage in direct combat; it's muscle, bone, and nerve-tissue that do the fighting, not the eyes—and since the two are physically equal, the fight should be equal, huh? Well, maybe it isn't eyes that do the fighting—but they yield an enormous advantage. In hunting prey, in avoiding enemies, in finding mates, in finding routes from here to there—eyes yield an overall advantage.

Yet eyes are a *specific,* not a general, superiority?

True . . . at their own level. They are specific sensory organs. But having such organs yields a sort of multiplying factor that increases all other advantages by a large factor.

Now the cave lizard would be sensitive to light; the heat of the sun would be apparent to him. Let's imagine the sighted lizard and the cave lizard meet, and the cave lizard after the first day or so of having the sighted lizard demonstrate his superiority, asks the sighted lizard to explain this thing he calls "seeing."

Go on—let's see you do it! Sensitivity to light? Why, the cave lizard knows what *that* is!

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What is Man's general superiority over all other animals?

It isn't the ability to think logically; other animals have that, as psychologists have demonstrated. But suppose it's *the ability to be consciously aware of logical thinking?* If you are *aware* of your logical thinking, you can then question it, observe it, and check it.

O.K.—now imagine a superman who has intuitive thinking ability of which he is consciously aware. Sure, we have intuitive abilities—all of us. But *we can't watch ourselves doing it*. And therefore we can't check, correct, refine, and improve our intuitive thinking. We can't *learn* to think intuitively. He could.

Now this would, of course, be merely a specific advantage, a special skill, not a general superiority, the psychologist hastens to insist.

Nuts, brother! You come up against that superman, and you'll discover what a general superiority can do to you. He'll be intuiting right answers, and intuiting with high precision, while you're struggling through the complex logical processes you have to rely on. (You can't rely on your intuition—it's too spotty. He can!) In pure science, he'll intuit short-cuts, rig a quick experiment, short-cut logic, and come up with a thing that works. In business, he'll intuit which way trends are going, and you'll discover that he's bought the raw material that you're about to need. In politics, he'll have strongly championed the unpopular cause . . . that everybody is just about to suddenly discover. Oh, it's "merely a specific skill" all right . . . but if you come up against it, you'll discover that darned "specific" scattered all over the landscape in the most general, and obnoxious, fashion.

A general superiority is exactly like a general law; it's a specific statement of a more fundamental level. A law of nuclear physics is specific at the level of nucleonics . . . but it's absolutely general at the level of chemistry, because it applies to *all* nuclei, and therefore to all chemical elements.

The Superman cannot communicate the nature of his superiority; he can only communicate the fact of his superiority. The sighted lizard cannot communicate the nature of sight to the blind lizard. The color-seeing cannot communicate the nature of color-vision to the color-blind—the meaning of color-vision, that is, although the process might be communicated by instrumental means. You can show black-and-white prints of a scene taken with red, yellow, and blue filters, and communicate thus the general idea of what color-vision is. But that doesn't supply the understanding of the richness of color-vision. Try the three-black-and-whites of a New England autumn foliage scene, and see if you get the satisfaction from that that you do from a full-color picture!

What of a superman who has one specific advantage; true clairvoyance? It would give him an advantage equivalent to sight in a sightless

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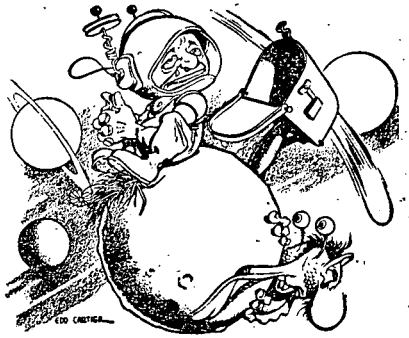
world. Specific . . . yes. But the product is enormously general!

Finally, there are, and have always been, Supermen born to the race of Man. Our present culture denies this; why, I don't understand fully. But the denial is a lie. There *are* Heroes.

Consider this as a bit of fiction: The hero of our story lands on a place where there is a primitive civilization—about equivalent to early Egypt. There is a highly formalized religion, a science good enough to build geometrically accurate pyramids, do surveying, et cetera. Our hero has with him only about four hundred men; they are met and attacked by the warriors of the native civilization. But our supermen heroes are not to be stopped by mere native warriors. Though forty thousand natives attack them, our fictional hero and his friends, because of their superhuman powers, overcome the natives, despite the odds of one hundred to one.

The natives, somewhat taken aback by this startling military performance, become uncertain, despite their immense advantage in odds. The local Pharaoh gets a message from our hero demanding that he swear allegiance to the Emperor of the Universe. Being a little uncertain, the Pharaoh decides to get this Superhero where he can see what he's like a little better, so invites him to come to his capital city.

The Pharaoh doesn't like what he sees. For a month he stalls our hero, holding him, and about one hun-



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dred fifty of his men, in the Pharaoh's capital city.

But our hero grows impatient. So, in the heart of the Pharaoh's capital city, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of the Pharaoh's fierce, conquering and greatly feared people, our hero walks into the Pharaoh's own palace, with three companions. There, surrounded by the Pharaoh's personal elite guard, our hero tells the Pharaoh, "You're under arrest! Don't bother packing; just come with me as you are!"

And the warrior king, leader of a dreaded, fierce warrior people . . . says "Yes, sir." And quietly comes.

This is somewhat like someone walking into Hitler's Chancellery in 1942, with three companions, and ordering Hitler to come quietly . . . and having Hitler do just exactly that.

A somewhat implausible fiction?

The name of our superman hero was Hernando Cortes, and the local Pharaoh was Montezuma. At the time Cortes landed, the Aztecs had just finished conquering the other tribes of Mexico; they were feared, fierce, and powerful warriors. Cortes and his little band met forty thousand Aztec warriors on the field of battle, and made hamburger of them. It was not due to their guns; they didn't have enough powder to waste that way. It wasn't due to their armor; the Spanish later adopted the superior Aztec quilted armor. (Be it noted that modern United States body armor is not made of nickle-molybdenum steel; it's quilted armor of fiberglass and nylon plastic.) It wasn't due to the Spaniard's horses; it was due to the Spanish *men*.

They were supermen.

Check out the history books! They had a driving, blazing power of sheer personality, of sheer will-to-achieve, that seems to have been the major cause of their success. It wasn't force of arms that made Montezuma, in his own palace, surrounded by his own elite guard, in his own city . . . follow Cortes like a naughty boy being sent to the principal.

Our hyperdemocratic culture lies in its teeth. There are, there were, there always will be heroes, supermen, men who, by the blazing power and brilliance of their performance make all normal men feel small and helpless.

So it's painful to discover what a Man can be . . . and know you're not.

Is that a reason to lie, to demean the great, to deceive yourself and others, by saying, "Oh, they're not really great or different. Lucky, maybe. But no better than I am."

Do that, and you're not only small —you're also mean, a cheat, and a liar.

There *are* supermen! There always have been; there always will be.

And it is only justice that the small, mean, and cowardly liar be punished for his sins.

THE EDITOR

THE END

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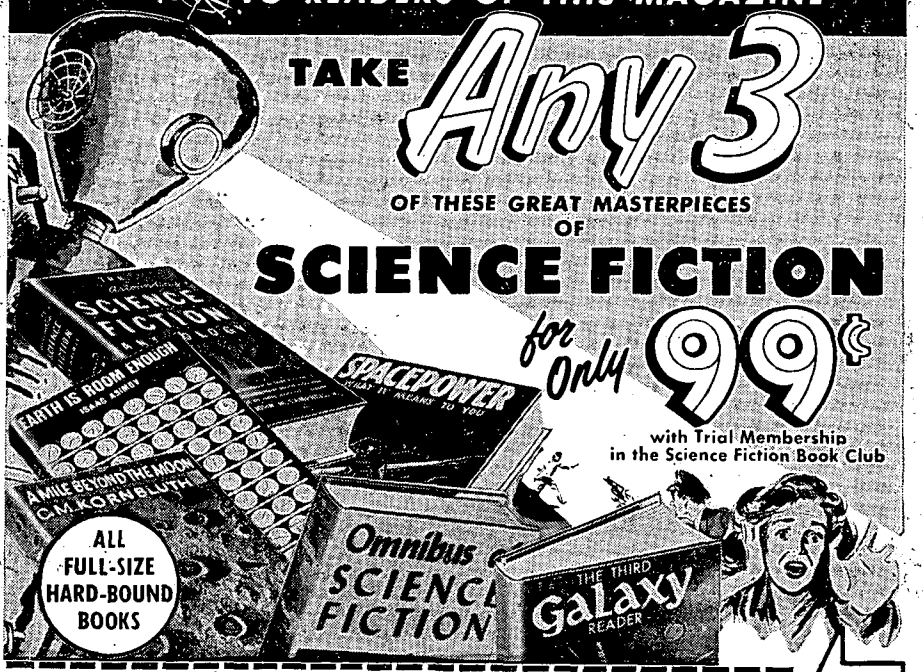

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